

HOLOCAUST TEACHERS' STORIES:  
LIFE, PEDAGOGY, AND MEANING

By

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Abstract:

How do secondary teachers' narratives reveal the influence of their life experiences on their commitments and approaches in Holocaust education? Employing Gadamerian Hermeneutics as the theoretical research frame and narrative inquiry as research methodology, the following research seeks to answer the above main research question. This study is important to furthering curriculum studies because few amounts of research exist on teachers' life-stories and the relationship they have to pedagogy and Holocaust curriculum. This research is conducted by examining experienced secondary Holocaust teachers through interviews, writing samples, and artifacts.

Findings include teacher narration that describes loss within each person's life and how they develop a willingness to deal with their loss. Their willingness has an effect on how they interact with students in teaching about the Holocaust. Through dedicated study, nonviolence, and the care of the self, participants remain at the site of meaning making and weave transformative spaces in which they create meaning and awareness for themselves and their students.

Findings also indicate that through acceptance, participants remained engaged with their own lives; built relationships with their students that included love and acceptance; and developed humility when dealing with difficult historical content.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Holocaust education introduces important lenses into the classroom as students grapple with issues of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism, to name a few topics, in an effort to develop a more informed citizenry (Berenbaum, 2006). Short and Reed (2002) argue for the importance of Holocaust education as instrumental to supporting the “development of well-rounded young people” (as cited in Cowan & Maitles, 2007, p. 128). However, the teacher must choose to teach the subject, and therefore I ask: What reasons contribute to teacher engagement? Horowitz (2009) states that teachers are significant to the continuance of teaching about Holocaust education. The merit and contributions of the teachers’ positions within and commitment to Holocaust education is significant to this study.

I began to teach Holocaust education to my middle school students by accident or perhaps “serendipitously” (Wang, 2014, p. 176), but what resulted was a surprise to me. In 2000, I taught Language Arts and my department chairperson suggested I teach the novel, *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* (1985). After teaching the novel, someone suggested I invite a Holocaust survivor to speak to my students, which I did. After the speaker finished his presentation, I invited students to ask questions. All 30 of them were silent. My students’ seeming lack of

response confused me, and so I asked these adolescents to reflect on their experiences via classroom writing assignments. To my surprise, all of the students turned in writings that contained copious amounts of emotional responses to what they heard from the speaker. What happened between the silence in speaking and the abundant responses in writing? Through thinking about these events, I began to acknowledge that many factors, including my lack of content and contextual knowledge, had influenced my students' understanding and their ability to connect with the speaker. In addition, perhaps my pedagogical unpreparedness to teach historical trauma influenced my ability to negotiate my students' silence and to facilitate the space between what appeared as a lack of response and one that was perhaps deeply emotional. With this realization of responsibility, I began my journey and inquiry into teaching and learning through Holocaust education as a way of growth.

Soon after, I met Eva Unterman, who at that time was 83 years old, and is a Holocaust survivor. In the city in which I live, Unterman was instrumental in the interfaith commemoration of the *Shoah* (Hebrew word for catastrophe, refers to Holocaust of 1933-45). At different times over the years following meeting her, she spoke to several of my classes, relaying her testimony. She also acted as a liaison for teachers interested in the Shoah by assisting in applying for different types of training that included the Belfer Museum training at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. I attended the Belfer training and in addition was selected to travel to training sites in three cities in three countries (e.g., Israel, Czech Republic, and Poland); however, the trainings were canceled two years in a row due to political unrest. I continued to teach the Holocaust to my students over the years, and I do not recall another silence so deafening as the one I first witnessed during my initial attempt. Was this

due to my own sustained engagement and multiple attempts at teaching this subject that I now ponder this occurrence as significant?

Recently, I left the classroom to take on a different position within my school district. In my post-classroom life, I continue to serve on the area Holocaust Educators' committee. It was Unterman's invitation that allowed me to serve, and the principle work of the committee is to assist in implementing educational opportunities for other teachers and to organize our city's Yom Hashoah or the International Day of Remembrance (see [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)).

In addition, it may be helpful for the reader to know that I come from a family of educators, professors, and professionals. My father, who retired from his career as a teacher, was significant in my life as he told stories of his life as a teacher and shared with me on multiple occasions how acceptance and unconditional love had a place in a teacher's life and in the classroom. We often spoke about acceptance as a way of respecting the stories and personal history of students. That is to say, parents send their best, their children, to our schools. Our job is to understand the student and use this understanding to connect them to *deep learning*. I use the phrase, deep learning, to indicate learning that lasts a lifetime and is not superficial. Because of the possibility of deeper connections, the teacher as a learner can reflect on the "aliveness of the situation that leads to new possibilities, 'to the not yet'" (Aoki, 2005, p. 163), student learning can be enriched, deepened, making their own deeper connections possible.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Holocaust of 1933-45, also known as the Shoah, is in a sense the origin of Holocaust education. Psychologists and psychiatrists used writing as a therapy method to assist victims who experienced the Holocaust first-hand (Horowitz, 2009). Encouraged by therapists and psychoanalysts who use writing as a method to foster their inner healing from trauma and as a

way to recover a way to live past it, survivors provided first-hand accounts that became books and videos portraying their survival. Thus, Holocaust survivor texts were born (i.e., Steven Spielberg's Shoah project, 1994). In addition, during the 1970s and 1980s an emergence of scholarship began through the efforts of Elie Wiesel and other Jewish leaders living in the U.S. who promoted teaching, telling (and writing about), and actor-portrayal of these stories. National consciousness grew and the public supported and funded the creation of the USHMM, which is a permanent repository of spoken, written, and physical artifacts. In the decades following the 1980s, secondary-school students began receiving Holocaust education from their classroom teachers (see [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)).

Horowitz (2009) discusses the four “operational states that coexist in studying (and teaching) the Holocaust” (p. 493):

- The study through actual historical events (i.e., the Nuremberg trials);
- The historical and journalistic state in which survivor memoirs were used to understand and study the Shoah;
- The plight of the Jewish people; and
- The study of human beings: ethical theory and moral doctrine.

Horowitz (2009) states that we are in this fourth stage, which encompasses the previous three and deals with ethical theory and moral doctrine. This allows for the study of humans: It is at this stage that Holocaust studies have become a field unto itself (p. 496). Horowitz (2009) posits there are many analytical questions that move research away from ethnography to scholarship surrounding specific ethical questions (i.e., understanding the phenomenon of exterminating a historical people, a major world religion, and a culture) (p. 498). He argues that a post-survivor generation, including teachers who are presently teaching the Holocaust to their students, has

much to contribute, in part because their historical distance offers an educational environment, which is likely less emotional as compared to the viewpoint of a survivor. Short and Reed (2002) argue for the importance of Holocaust education as instrumental to “inoculate” the public against xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitic propaganda (as cited in Cowan & Maitles, 2007). Learning of the Holocaust is instrumental to the “development of well-rounded young people” (p. 128). However, teaching the Holocaust can be fraught with many difficulties. Linquist (2011) states that teachers must carefully consider teaching the Holocaust willingly, because the topic and subject matter requires risk and commitment.

Holocaust denial is also a threat to Holocaust education. Several obstacles prevent teaching the Holocaust in an effective, well-informed researched manner (i.e., utopian thinking and Holocaust fatigue) (Jordan, 2004; Morris, 2001). Cowan and Maitles (2007) suggest that despite attention to Holocaust curriculum, xenophobia and racism cause some to disregard Holocaust education all together. Teachers who dedicate themselves to learning Holocaust content and pedagogy will ensure the likelihood that this important discourse remains a viable part of secondary classroom dialogue and pedagogy (Horowitz, 2009). Despite the importance of this curriculum topic, many teachers do not study and teach the Holocaust as curriculum. This lack of sustained teacher engagement and teaching Holocaust curriculum to secondary students could be related to the teachers’ choices and perspectives. By studying why and how teachers sustain their engagement, despite difficulty, we can learn important lessons to improving teachers’ commitment to Holocaust education. Morris (2001) states that the last generation of survivors is dying and “the burden of memory will be on us” (p. 123). Teachers, in addition to second-generation survivors (e.g., direct descendants of survivors), are ones to pass this important pedagogy to students. Deepening the understanding and meaning making concerning

processes that experienced teachers embrace in order to connect with and commit to the Holocaust as a curriculum subject may inspire more teachers to take on this important educational task.

There are many studies on Holocaust pedagogy and programs (Leyman & Harris, 2013; Misco, 2009; Totten & Feinberg, 2001;). For instance, Jennings (2010) partners with a teacher, Irene Pattenau, to conduct an ethnographic study of fifth-grade children during a school year, to determine how these children perceive rights, respect, and responsibility through a unit on the Holocaust. She states that the Holocaust can provide a “balanced view of citizenship” (p. 38). Through the study, Jennings explores the necessity of teaching the Holocaust through carefully selected pedagogical choices of materials that include children’s literature. It is heartening that such young children could learn such difficult subjects through sound pedagogical approaches, and in this case the pedagogy is through teaching children’s literature.

There are also some studies demonstrating the important role of teachers in Holocaust education. In the international context, Misco (2009) presents research about Romanian classrooms and argues his research supports meaningful Holocaust education in other contexts (i.e., other cultures). He posits teacher education must be based on historical and rational considerations or risk resulting in misinformation. Using fabricated misinformation – similar to post-Holocaust denials that the Holocaust is not an historical event – has a *corrosive* effect (Misco, 2008). Including misinformation without questioning it nullifies academic (i.e., USHMM) efforts that use legitimately established and historically accurate materials to train large numbers of teachers and improve teachers’ knowledge base of the Holocaust. This means the teacher should not pass on misinformation and must make sustained efforts to deepen their knowledge base and understanding through committed engagement. One of the first trainings I

attended was a bus tour sponsored by USHMM. The idea was for teachers to be trained on basic Holocaust information on the way to viewing a large traveling display called *Daniel's Story* (see [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org)). Ignorantly, I asked the trainer a question about Judaism as a race. He explained that there were many *shtetls* (villages) in Eastern Europe in which many of the people were Jews; however, Judaism is a religion. Judaism as a race was Nazi propaganda (Zollman, n.d.). I had to accept that my views were incorrect and be willing to learn. In addition, teacher instruction and engagement is dependent on each teacher's commitment to autonomy and their willingness to "investigate the topic" (Misco, 2009, p.14).

In teacher education, Leifso (2010) explores pre-service teacher attitudes toward the significance of Holocaust education in her dissertation that examines educators working in the provincial (state) education system in the province of Ontario, Canada. The introduction of the topic may occur when the teacher is in pre-service (e.g., student teaching phase) or later during their in-service years. The respondents expressed a desire to continue with Holocaust education, once they had begun teaching it to their students. The teacher is significant to the teaching and learning of Holocaust education; however, there are few qualitative studies related to how teachers' life history connects the teacher to a difficult subject, namely to Holocaust education. My research study intends to understand what is behind teachers' commitments to Holocaust education: How do their life experiences connect them to the topic and influence their pedagogy in the classroom?

Addressing teacher stories is not new to curriculum studies (Ayers & Schubert, 1982; Furlong, 2013; Kirk & Wall, 2010). While there is literature in curriculum studies that link life stories with teachers' identity and meaning-making in various contexts and different subjects, I have not found substantial literature on Holocaust educators' life and teaching stories and how

these experiences impact their commitment and approaches to Holocaust education. These stories should be told to inspire continued teacher engagement with Holocaust education. I chose to focus on secondary teachers since Holocaust education is implemented more often at secondary, rather than elementary level.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the narrations of four to eight experienced Holocaust educators at the secondary level in order to understand how the participants' life experiences and previous teaching experiences contributed to their commitment, as well as pedagogical approaches to Holocaust education. The participants' commitment means that they choose to teach, have taught, and continue to teach Holocaust studies. For this study, I chose teachers who have taught Holocaust education for at least five years. The pedagogical approach means the way in which teachers choose the subtopics and how they choose to teach them. More specifically, it included teaching methods and strategies, pedagogical considerations in choosing selected literature and specific historical artifacts, and pedagogical interactions and relationships with students. The timeline of the Holocaust, the Shoah, is defined as the years between 1933-45. Because it is historically connected to the prior years (before 1933) in which Germany suffered extreme economic, social, and psychological distress due to the country's depressed economy and loss of national pride, however, teachers may also choose to select issues of pre-Nazi Germany or discuss when and how Hitler came to power. Using these criteria, I chose seven participants for this study.

### **Research Questions**

Holocaust survivor and scholar, Elie Wiesel (2008) shared that whatever we endure as experience cannot stay with ourselves alone, but rather it must be shared and deepened. I



researched the teachers whose experience as Holocaust educators can be shared because they are participants and part of the larger historical context of Holocaust education.

The main research question is:

How do experienced secondary teachers' narratives reveal the influence of their life experiences on their commitments and approaches in Holocaust education?

- Sub-Question 1: How do the participants' life experiences explain their commitment to Holocaust education?
- Sub-Question 2: How do the participants' lives and previous teaching experiences shift their pedagogical approaches in the classroom?
- Sub-Question 3: What does it mean to be a Holocaust educator?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study explored the stories of Holocaust educators through the narration of seven experienced teachers to understand their commitment and pedagogical approaches. Through the research process, I studied a small group of experienced teachers whose narration is their personal text. Here, the teachers' continued commitment and diverse pedagogical use surpasses the mandatory or cursory teaching of a novel such as, *Anne Frank* (1985). Smith (1991) posits that hermeneutics make possible the investigation of the meanings of words and phenomena within cultural and historical context so that the researcher can co-create meanings with the participants. This is what Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) call the hermeneutic dialectic. This requires some flexibility on my part as researcher as I dance carefully to understand the participant's meaning and weave this meaning to answer the research questions. Such a process of understanding and meaning making matched the purpose of my study. Interpretation is the foundational method through which to understand the human being and

human experiences. Hans Georg Gadamer is the most significant hermeneutic scholar of the 20th century. Gadamer's notion of "philosophical hermeneutics" is ontological because it is through understanding that we become beings in the world and that the truth about us is known (Dowling, 2004, p. 35).

The notion of hermeneutic inquiry has a long history originating in the ancient world. The Greeks called this "practical philosophy" (Gadamer as quoted in Smith, 1991, p. 187). During the Reformation, scholars questioned the church's traditional interpretation of sacred text as the only method to understanding truth through knowledge. In other words, knowledge was deciphered through a specific method supported by those in power. Hermeneutic scholars continue to question this tradition, to go beyond it, and to open possibilities for various different interpretations of texts. Gadamerian hermeneutics stands on the idea: Understanding is linguistic and historical, and meaning shifts depending on historical considerations and circumstances, so interpretation of knowing becomes important (Dowling, 2004; Malpas, 2003).

Gadamer (Malpas, 2003) makes researchers aware of our prejudices and of the traditions we contain within our beings while we are engaged in understanding. Significant to a basic understanding of Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics has the following assumptions:

- History is wedded to language and to understanding;
- The human self is significant to knowing and the self is part of history, the interpretation, and understanding;
- Conversations open up windows of knowing (Grondin, 2002); and
- Understanding is unfolded through horizons of understanding between whole and parts (Crotty, 1998).

Gadamer (1989) posits that one must consider historic context in which linguistic meanings are situated. Knowing is a part of the self and the self is part of hermeneutic understanding. Gadamer (1989) argues the researcher must understand that *prejudice* (p. 283) is necessary for participants to begin the discussion about whatever is being studied. Dostal (2002) discusses Gadamer's notion of prejudice as key to the concept of the horizons of understanding. Understanding is based on an interpretation that is essentially a revision of what was once understood, but is now subject to more compelling evidence (Grondin, 2002, p. 44). As the interpreter engages with the text this creates the hermeneutic experience. In addition, Gadamer (1989) asserts that hermeneutic experience happens when the anticipations are shattered. Those anticipations are the prejudices the interpreter brings to the site of interpretation. Gadamer posits that these prejudices accompany the interpreter and define the point from which the interpreter is engaged in the task of understanding. One might also consider this type of understanding is constructionism because it is co-constructed. As the researcher, I interacted with the words of the participants. I asked questions in an attempt to further understand the participant and this also deepened my own understanding with regard to the research; this enabled me to ask better or different questions in an attempt to follow the emerging knowing of the participant. The participant's story was deeply connected to the research questions and created new and deeper interconnected knowing as they sought to answer my questions and ultimately the research questions.

Gadamer (1989) states "most experiences, true experiences, that deliver insight, appears negative at first" (p. 283). In other words, they appear to be negative because they work against what was once thought and therefore humans regard this new knowledge as anti or against what was once established as the interpreted truth. Out of this new interpretation that incorporates new

understanding comes a different reality, which we can be open to accept. In so doing, the interpreter and those who can embrace the newer interpretation must be willing to change their mind and shift to include this new understanding. Due to the transformative possibilities of hermeneutic experience, the interpreter must be open to an ever-newer experience, and therefore to changing the static interpretation. In other words, another horizon has been added to nuanced meaning. This horizon involves the researcher as significant to meaning making. To do this, I allowed participants to surprise me, and I more deeply understood my own prejudice and opened up to new understanding, leading to further interpretation of teachers and their involvement with Holocaust education.

Understanding requires dialogue between text and interpreter. What one understands makes a difference in what one does, and this understanding has an affect on one's historical consciousness. The interpreter is part of history and brings one's own historical context and understanding to the interpretation cycle of meaning making process. This cannot be divorced from the interpretation itself inasmuch as it is an indivisible part of the person, the interpreter. Discussion and conversation is the vehicle for understanding and new interpretations, the newer conceived meanings. In this study, discussion between participant and researcher was initiated through conversations. Gadamer (1989) argues the most important kind of hermeneutic is that which is subject to "effective historical consciousness" and new lived realities can transform both the participant and the researcher if indeed both accept this attitude (p. 312). The one who seeks to understand and the one who expresses are "connected by human consciousness" and this makes understanding possible, and understanding is universal through this connection (Dowling, 2004, p. 35). The hermeneutic understanding situated in history and context guided this study as

teachers' lives and teaching experiences are historically contextualized and the topic of the Holocaust is historical.

### **Research Design**

Petra Munro Hendry (2010) argues that narrative research is the oldest form of inquiry since both scientific and humanistic traditions originate from this type of knowing. This study's design is rooted in the "essential creating and re-creating" of knowledge through story telling and retelling (Hendry, 2010, p. 73). Hendry (2010) states that narrative inquiry is the way in which we come to know, the method by which what is known is translated into the understood. Hendry (2010) supports the use of narrative inquiry to establish meaning in scientific, symbolic and sacred texts to open up new possibilities for understanding human experience and the metaphysical. In this broadly defined narrative research, this study uses narrative inquiry through teacher text, their stories, and narrations.

The research design is within the interpretive frame of hermeneutics and narrative inquiry as a method is used to understand Holocaust teachers' life stories and their connection to the their commitment and pedagogical choices. After Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began the following process of purposeful sampling. I asked the director of the area Holocaust educators committee to send an initial email query to all listserve members. The body of the email is Appendix B and within the email is the link to the Google form, which includes the questions listed in Appendix A. Appendix A, itself, was not sent in the email. After teachers responded through phone or return email and completed the Google form, I selected of seven teachers who lived in different parts of the county of a Midwest state based on available diversity and expertise of the possible participants. Upon choosing the participants, I sent or gave each chosen participant the recruitment letter, which included information about the study (see

Appendix C). After the participant approved and agreed to be in the research, I emailed or gave each participant the informed consent form (see Appendix D) before further conducting my research. Each participant and I separately retained a copy of their signed informed consent to meet IRB requirements. My selected participants were all those who met the criteria of an experienced Holocaust teacher and I was not able to secure enough gender or racial diversity. I did not select one participant over the other. The data sources included at least three interviews, two writing prompts, and multiple teacher artifacts or projects. The participants were asked to respond to two writing prompts, one before the start of the interviews and one between interviews two and three. The participant writing revealed additional themes that seem to emerge in between the interviews. Writing prompts were also used to complement interviews.

I interviewed each participant at least three times for 1 to 1.5 hours (see Appendix E for initial interview questions). Each interview was semi-structured, so the researcher was open to the meaning of the participant and could follow where the data led. The study had more questions than are included in the appendix and these will be included in the transcription of each interview. After the interviews were transcribed, each participant was asked to check the transcription and make corrections, additions, or omit incorrect words and statements.

For artifacts, I invited teachers to share what was significant to them according to their choices (i.e., the teacher may choose a piece of personal art or writing or that of a student). Teachers described and explained why these artifacts were likely to be somewhat representative of their pedagogy, and I recorded teachers' explanations and had them transcribed.

These data sources were triangulated and collected for analysis. In the data analysis I included both re-telling of participant's stories and thematic analysis of narratives using all data sources (e.g., interviews, writings, and artifacts). I read and re-read the text (including interview

transcriptions, writing prompts, and artifacts) several times and coded passages for emerging themes using the method of open coding (Patton, 2002, p. 463). I privileged each participant's stories and realities without superimposing my own opinions, being mindful to enter into the conversation carefully where the data led, willing to uncover even negative findings to avoid a romantic view of the participant's story. These data were compared across participants and with the literature to determine general and specific meanings related to the participant's life and teaching.

Grondin's (2002) discussion of Gadamer's version of the hermeneutic circle is one in which meaning is made between the anticipation of meaning and is therefore a process between the participant and the researcher. Understanding unfolds in the interpretive process (p. 47). Because the participants selected his or her words to relay answers to open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format, the challenge for me as the researcher was to uncover the meaning within the text with awareness of the implication of my own biases and understanding as a teacher of Holocaust education. This gave richer interpretation to the teachers' text and deeper understanding from the analysis and conclusions in this dissertation. The idea was not to impose my voice over the participants, and the interview questions are designed to be as open as possible. The participants opened up new pathways for knowledge to be created and as the researcher, I was attentive to "something new and other" (Wang, 2005, p. 46).

### **Researcher Subjectivity**

As the researcher, I am also an experienced public school teacher. I have taught since the mid 1980s, first as a special education teacher and then as an English teacher at the secondary level. When I first began to teach students about the Holocaust, a male professor questioned me about my involvement by asking, "What does this topic have to do with you?" I did the best

thinking I could at the time, and replied that the Holocaust was a lesson of man's inhumanity to man. I felt being a human being not only qualified me, but also encouraged my commitment to the topic. Looking back, I wonder if his question was related to my ethnicity. I am obviously not white, not Jewish, and not male. However, after having taught the Holocaust to students for more than 15 years, being a graduate student, and learning qualitative research, I began to deeply question the origins of my involvement. For example, as a young child growing up in Hawaii, my father took our family to listen to Corrie ten Boom speak. I remember sitting in the darkened auditorium and listening to ten Boom tell her story of survival and of the persecution and loss she endured because her family chose to assist and hide Jews trying to escape Holland. I was very young, and so much of her speech was beyond my comprehension; however, I remembered standing in line and greeting ten Boom and her taking my face in her hands as she asked my father, "Is this your child?" I remembered her piercing blue eyes and upswept hair. I also remember, being much older, and watching a movie about her book, *The Hiding Place*, and understood her story was deeply personal, historical, and political. Then as a teacher, I showed this film as part of my curriculum.

I remember the servanthood of my own parents and the conversations – held long ago in Hawaii – around our dinner table concerning education and how social justice should be exemplified by how one lives their life. I held many conversations with my father about looking into people's faces and recognizing their humanity by honoring their race and ethnicity. He taught me to honor my own ethnicity and to remember that what I see in the mirror may not be what others see. I believe my stories build a link to the research topic in which I have engaged: I am a teacher, student, and researcher and have asked Holocaust teachers to delve into their lives and trust me with their stories.



In addition, being a Holocaust educator myself does not mean that I already “know,” nor does it diminish my sense of a humble approach to understanding others’ stories. As a researcher I also became a part of or instrumental to the stories that will be told by participants. There was a responsibility to listen to and understand the meaning making of participants, carefully and with fidelity. One can engage with learning with an attitude of wonder, questioning how this new sense applies to what has already taken place or what has once been thought.

Having been trained at the USHMM, I am familiar with what is considered sound content and pedagogy. I have biases due to my content knowledge and experiences. My own experience as a teacher was significant since my research participants are also educators in or near the medium-size city in which I live and work. My experience influenced me to have a negative opinion toward less experienced educators. In addition, I have worked as a new-teacher mentor and believe in a growth mindset. In other words, our own truths are subject to change as we grow and change as humans. We are able to transform, rather than remain static. As Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010) state, “learning to teach is not just a matter of de-contextualized skills, but also connects one’s past to the present” (p. 563). My attitude about teaching and learning predisposed me to view a teacher’s story as a work in progress, an evolving narration of becoming, and therefore I was careful not to interpret participant stories in an overly positive way. Awareness of these possible prejudices alerted and cautioned me about my attitude and awareness when interviewing these teachers. I also understood the work involved in teaching gives me an insider’s perspective; one a researcher must balance in this study when deciphering participants’ meanings. A challenge for me was to capture the “range of possibilities” (Patton, 2002, p. 50); to be careful; and to interpret as completely the whole to the parts, and back again. To facilitate this process, I kept a researcher journal.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research is in part a result of dealing with Nazi abuse and war crimes. The Nuremberg codes became the foundation for later ethical guidelines concerning research subjects. The university's IRB policies governed my initial and fundamental procedural process for this study, and I applied for IRB approval after my committee approved the research proposal. My responsibility was to fulfill institutional approval and then to act ethically with regard to research and research participants. The plan of this study ensured that participants knew at the outset they would be asked some potentially sensitive questions and they may choose not to answer them. If unexpected stress emerged and the participant(s) became distressed, I ensured they knew that negative feelings sometimes occur, and they could seek appropriate counseling as a means to protect their welfare. Participant dignity was protected because their interview was kept anonymous to others. I will destroy any stored audio after I defend my dissertation and it is approved. I keep participants' transcribed text and their signed consent forms secured in my home office. Copies are available to the IRB as necessary.

I did not engage in deception. Participants have known the topic of Holocaust education and their engagement with it. Experienced with the subject matter, participants chose what to narrate and reference within the interview process, and they could decline to answer a question. There were no inducements for participants to enter into the research. I worked in relationship with each participant to ensure trust within the interview process. This is a significant ethical consideration that Aoki (1998) explains as, "shared."

Aoki (1998) states even as one narrates, the story is not singularly the narrator's, but rather becomes a part of one in which the listener (or interviewer) is involved. That is to say, when the story is spoken, it becomes living text because as it is shared it becomes "dramatic interplay" (p.

410). Aoki (1998) calls this the “metonymic space of narrative and narration” (p. 410). This difficult space is one that is centerless; the ideas are not easily understood or may not be clear with regard to the meaning. He says we often rush to fill this space, but we must “tarry” and spend time with what is not yet understood, learning to linger with and not overtake or superimpose meaning as replacement of what was once there (but not completely definable at first). This is the position I took to pursue this study: one in which intimacy through narration is the cohabitation within the conversation, narration and the narrative; the active interchange in which the speaker and the listener share ideas and change roles as the conversation proceeds, so that “narrative becomes intertwined... personal, and shared” (Hershock as cited in Aoki, p. 409).

### Significance of the Study

Although Holocaust education is prominent, there is little research studying the Holocaust educator, who as stated previously, is increasingly more important because first generation Holocaust survivors are dying. This study involves researching the experienced teachers’ life experience and how this influences their engagement with Holocaust education and their pedagogical choices. Through the dissertation research, I studied a group of these teachers and the narration of their life experiences that integrates and supports their commitment to Holocaust education beyond a mandatory or cursory teaching of *Anne Frank* (1985). This research was organic in design because the theoretical frame of hermeneutics is tied to narrative inquiry, the methodology. The possible transformation that originated from this hermeneutic understanding personally for both the researcher and the teachers themselves also provides deep interpretation to history and to our understanding of teaching, teachers, and Holocaust education, adding to existing research and addressing new territory, the interfacing of teachers’ stories and that of their involvement with Holocaust education.

Practically, this study affects teachers in general due to what may surface concerning a teacher's life history and its connections to commitment and pedagogy. Teachers may learn from the stories of other educators and how they traverse difficult curriculum and embrace the struggle for themselves to teach difficult topics while making meaning. Curriculum administrators and professors in higher education may find educators' stories worthwhile when planning coursework for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers' professional development. This study brings to the fore the importance of each individual *teacher* when considering Holocaust education within curriculum studies. Teachers are now an important part of Holocaust education. Their historical situation as players within education and their personal story of commitment and pedagogical ties to a difficult subject are imperative to understanding sustained teacher engagement.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review includes the following topics that are related to my research: A historical context for Holocaust curriculum, Holocaust pedagogy, and the possible reasons and conditions for teachers to engage with difficult subjects. The concept of *experienced* teacher in the research question means several things, which involve years of training about the subject and the actual time in years spent teaching the subject to students (Belfer National Conference for Educators, ushmm.org).

I begin this chapter by providing an overview of the events after World War II (WWII) to around the 1980s that led to what we now consider Holocaust education. The Holocaust (Shoah) as a curriculum topic, one that presently exists in our societal consciousness, has a story, an origin, even though perhaps no beginning dates. Fallace (2008) states that the rise of Holocaust education in U.S. public schools is related to the rise in worldwide Holocaust consciousness as survivors recovered from their survivor's guilt and began to share their stories. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter established a commission on the Holocaust on Nov. 1, 1978 (*History of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, n.d.), and as a result, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was established and Congress granted land for

building the structure. Holocaust education is taught at this national museum, and teachers who are trained at the museum then return to their respective schools to teach their students and some continue this type of engagement with the subject on a perennial basis.

Frampton (1989) studied the Department of [Public] Education within each of the 50 states for his doctoral studies and determined these departments did not require this subject be taught in either history or in English classes at the time of his study. The state in which I teach does not require a Holocaust unit; however, the Holocaust is listed in the history standards. The teachers who choose to teach the Holocaust as a unit do so as part of a personal choice. Each of my participants have at least 20 years of teaching experience and at least a decade of learning about and then incorporating Holocaust studies into their English or history classes.

In this chapter I also address what literature suggests as pedagogical strategies for teaching the *Shoah* as part of the intended curriculum (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead & Boschee, 2012). The pedagogy section is organized according to the major themes I have found related to teaching Holocaust through studying suggestions made by Holocaust scholars, by the USHMM, and by educators who taught this topic. Lastly, I discuss how teachers' life history is significant to teaching and connecting with the subjects they choose to teach.

### **Historical Context: Introduction to the Shoah**

The Holocaust, also known as the Shoah, is the annihilation (genocide) that occurred against Jews in occupied Europe from 1933-45. Homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, political dissidents, and the handicapped were amongst the groups who endured great persecution. The word Holocaust is Greek and was used to define the 1933-45 event, however, the term itself means "a sacrificial offering to God" ("Introduction to the Holocaust," n.d.). As a response to the inappropriate denotation of this word to define the annihilation, a new word was coined. Around

1970, the word Shoah or calamity is used and adopted in Israel, which means “wasteland” or “destruction” (Morris, 2001, p. 120). The Shoah is the “systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators” (“Introduction to the Holocaust,” n.d.). The complete official definition will be discussed later in this chapter. Eleven million people were killed in concentration camps due to widespread persecution and imprisonment of other groups (i.e., homosexuals, Roma-Sinti (Gypsies), Jehovah’s Witnesses, political prisoners, and dissidents) (“Introduction to the Holocaust,” n.d.), but for this chapter I will discuss the group targeted for annihilation, the Jews. Other groups, included in the official definition, were persecuted for various religious, political, and ethnic reasons. Their suffering should not be minimized, but this paper will not allow me the physical space to deal with all persecuted groups and their individual or special circumstances under Nazi ideology and therefore, so I will concentrate on the Jewish suffering.

The Jews were subjected to many anti-Semitic *pogroms* (mass action of violence against Jews) over the centuries of their existence as a people. This type of persecution is described as *anti-Semitism*. The Nazis persecution was the worst in the modern era (“Anti-Semitism,” n.d.). They came to power in Germany in January 1933 and believed that Germans were racially superior and deemed the Jews inferior. In 1935 the Nazi’s announced the Nuremberg Laws, which made Nazi ideology the laws of Germany and the laws of any subsequently conquered territory. These laws redefined a “Jew” as someone with three or four Jewish grandparents regardless of whether the individual belonged to or practiced Judaism. These laws racialized all of Nazi society by alienating German Jews and stripping them of their German citizenship. It became illegal to marry a “Jew.” Jews, who were defined as such by Nazi Germany, could not go to certain public places, could not attend the same schools as Germans (those considered Aryans)

and no longer had the same economic power as Germans. They were harassed in the streets, labeled as subhuman, and their economic power was eliminated through pogroms, to name some of the escalating violence based on this new racialization of a group of people that German society had relabeled. Under these new laws, Jewish people were defined as the alien threat to the so-called German racially pure community (“Rallying the Nation,” n.d.). Hershock (2012) states that German fascism developed well before WWII as a response to “disenchantment with modernity but were far from isolated” (p. 179). Other major countries of the world, similar to the U.S., dealt with otherness through alienation of Jews. Jews were subject to several pogroms over the years of their existence as a people, and the persecution during WWII is significant when considering U.S. nativism and lack of involvement in rescuing and thereby alleviating the human suffering of refugees from Nazi occupied countries.

### **The U.S. Response: From Isolation and Nativism to Taking a Stand**

The U.S. was in a race for global hegemony long before the Cold War (after the end of WWII to the fall of the USSR in 1991) and chose to isolate itself from getting involved in the rescue of Jews by “clinging to nativism” (Hershock, 2012, p. 178). Nativism as it relates to politics is the notion that foreigners are strangers that do not share the same needs as people who are native to the land. There were overtones of racial superiority as the immigrants were lesser than other people and the needs of those in the dominant culture come first (Said, 1993). The Great Depression (1929-1939) placed an economic strain that helped feed anti-Semitic feelings, creating a hostile, unwilling environment to take in Jewish refugees. Beginning in 1940, the U.S. further restricted immigration by delaying visa approvals based on national security (“Rallying the Nation,” n.d.). By 1941, Jewish immigration to the U.S. diminished due to the increased and



intense killing of Jews by the Nazis. There were simply no more individuals making application to emigrate.

Finally, in response to pressure from the American Jewish community and from Roosevelt's own officials, namely Henry Morgenthau Jr., the U.S. responded. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt took action to rescue European Jews in 1944 when the War Refugee board was finally established ("Morgenthau Diary: Meeting Memorandum," n.d.). In April of 1944, Roosevelt allowed Fort Ontario, New York, to permit refugees to enter; however, these refugees were from non-Nazi occupied areas and this very late help did not provide maximum relief. Of these 200,000 Jewish refugees, most emigrated before 1941. Dinnerstein (2000) states Roosevelt selected to focus on ending the war rather than to compel Congress, with its growing numbers of anti-Semitic members, to increase the immigration quota. Roosevelt attempted to pass an immigration bill in 1943 and increase the power of the presidency to enable the quicker transport of peoples and goods in and out of the country, but Congress opposed this emergency authority (Dinnerstein, 2000).

Another example of U.S. isolation and nativism is the 1939 Voyage of the *MS St. Louis*, a German ocean liner carrying 937 passengers, most of them Jewish, who hoped to eventually enter the U.S. The passengers held landing certificates to enter Cuba, which would allow a temporary stay until their visa applications were approved for entrance into the U.S. (Voyage of the *MS St. Louis*, May 13, 1939). However, they were denied entrance into Cuba and when the ship sailed near Florida, they were not allowed to disembark despite the captain begging U.S. officials. Belgium, The Netherlands, England, and France, however, did admit refugees [but not all of the ship's passengers were admitted to these countries]. The remaining passengers aboard ship were forced to return to Europe and to captivity and death in concentration camps. Incidents,

such as that of the *MS St. Louis*, bolstered the Nazi belief that no country would take in Jews and therefore, it was incumbent upon Germany to exterminate them. Clearly, the U.S. desire to remain neutral and uninvolved also resulted in the loss of life that could have been saved if the U.S. had admitted the refugees.

The role of the U.S. changed to one of guardianship after the liberation of Dachau death camp by U.S. Supreme Allied Commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton. Patton's troops saw first-hand the ghastly remnant. Between 1945 and 1951 – already involved in WWII since 1941 – the U.S. became the guardian of more than one million displaced persons (DPs). The remaining survivors needed assistance, which came through the newly formed United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). Anti-Semitism continued as non-Jewish DPs and German police continued to harass Jewish DPs. Then U.S. President Harry S. Truman sent University of Pennsylvania Law Dean, Earl Harrison, to investigate continued Jewish DPs being harassed by former perpetrators and as a result, Jewish DPs were separated. Clearly, the end of the war and the defeat of Nazi Germany neither squelched the feelings of prejudice, nor did it sufficiently increase the empathy for those Jews who continued to be othered as they tried to restore their lives or regain their property. In May 1945, the Allied forces returned six million DPs to their home countries, but about two million refused this action due to violence, loss of their property, and continued anti-Semitism (i.e., 42 Jewish Shoah survivors were killed in a pogrom), resulting in another Jewish refugee exodus from Poland. Many remained in British and American occupation zones for protection until they could leave Europe. During this time the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine becomes a topic of concern for many displaced Jews, as their tenuous safety was a victim of continued anti-Semitism.

Zionists (Jews who wanted an independent Jewish state) had also been petitioning for the formation of Israel and around 1945, Congress relaxed immigration and quota laws for the U.S., making emigration once again possible. Ironically German Jews were favored, but Polish and Russian Jews were not; this is an example of racism within the countries, including the U.S., and immigration policies varied widely in post-war dealings (“Israel Science and Technology Homepage,” n.d.). Dinnerstein (2000) states that collaborators with Germany were given preferential treatment when entering the U.S. In the fall of 1946, the American Jewish Committee, having been formed in 1945 by Truman, campaigned for 400,000 DPs to travel to the U.S. Jewish and other refugees emigrated to the U.S. along with their personal stories and experiences.

### **Survivor’s Guilt and A Return to Normalcy**

In the final stages of the war as Germany’s infrastructure was systematically disassembled, Nazis became aware of their impending loss and tried to destroy everyone and all evidence of their plan for Jewish annihilation. One Nazi tool was starvation. When the Allied troops liberated Auschwitz they witnessed the human tragedy of the last standing remnants of Nazi destruction, *walking skeletons* – human beings so malnourished that they resembled skeletons covered with skin. Eisenhower stated that he made a “visit deliberately [to Dachau]... to give first-hand evidence of these things... if ever there develops a tendency to charge these allegations to propaganda” (Eisenhower’s letter to U.S. Army Gen. George C. Marshall, dated April 15, 1945).

Amidst their liberation and subsequent to returning to a new normalcy, survivors could barely *feel*. Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist and himself a survivor, stated that prisoners dragged themselves out of camp, but the concept of freedom had lost its meaning. They had “literally lost their ability to feel [pleased] and had to relearn it” (Frankl, 2006, p. 88). Eli Wiesel, a Holocaust

survivor, scholar, author and the first Chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust and an important member of the USHMM, was imprisoned at Auschwitz and transferred to the camp in Buchenwald, Germany, from which he was liberated. He said he felt grateful to be spared, but reminded other survivors to not only cling to hope, but to also remember (Wiesel, E. (2017, April 21, *Hope, Despair and Memory*). Fogelman (2000) points out that soon after liberation the survivors were judged. People who had not been held in the camps wanted to know if the survivors were normal, crazy or worse. Some said these survived because they really were evil and egotistical and they survived on their wits. The press reported, "The few that remain to us in Europe are not necessarily Judaism's best" (Fogelman, 2000, p. 90). He says the guilt of having done nothing, which the bystanders held, was passed onto survivors when other Jews treated the survivors as pariahs. Those who survived traveled a long distance to normalcy beginning with "affective anesthesia" (Fogelman, 2000, p. 91). This condition was discovered in most survivors as a defense against danger and daily anxiety suffered in the concentration camps.

Victor Frankl (2006) calls this "depersonalization" (p. 88), a psychological mindset that includes anhedonia and alexithymia – the inability for one to feel or to know what one is feeling (Fogelman, 2000, p. 91). Each survivor must realize the loss of the old identity (i.e., if you were a mother, but had to give up your child to a family or lost a child in the camps, then your identity as a mother was destroyed). Each survivor's Jewish-identity was disrupted and detached from their core-identity and reattachment to an earlier level of functioning must occur (p. 92). Psychologists helped survivors reconnect to themselves, pre-Holocaust period, and reintegrate themselves into a new normal state. They also suggested that survivors write memoirs to include the history of their lives before the war. This rebuilding did not deny the occurrence of atrocities but enabled people to "dramatic (ally) transform," also a goal of education (Hensley, 2011, p.

180). Some filled the void through work, playing, learning, and marrying as a way to recreate themselves, to “create meaning with others and concomitantly create[ing] enlarged understandings of self” (Latta, 2013, p.16). In this way, living with other DPs in camp also served to heal the guilt. From marital unions, the second generation of survivors was born in DP camps or in new countries. Greenfeld (2001) states that the end of WWII did not redeem the suffering of European Jews. Indeed, the suffering and isolation continued after the Holocaust and in the continued displacement of these people who suffered with anhedonia (e.g., the emotional state in which one cannot experience pleasure) and alexithymia (e.g., chronic feelings of emptiness, having no word for emotions). To add difficulty to unspeakable tragedy, there are those who claim the Holocaust never happened and that it is Jewish propaganda, one of the excuses used by Holocaust deniers.

### **Holocaust Denial**

It is important to briefly discuss the phenomenon Deborah Lipstadt (1993) calls Holocaust denial. I will examine denial and focus on Mathis’ (2006) argument that denial is related to semantics and historicity because fundamentally denier ideology is based in anti-Semitism and indifference (Lang, 2010). For me to provide a more complete explanation of the denier phenomenon would require another dissertation; the problems and complexities of those who claim the Shoah did not happen, is a myth, or is Jewish propaganda to gain favor for the nation of Israel to exist occupy volumes. The issues of Holocaust denial may be problematic for students as they begin to venture into researching about the Holocaust, and therefore, it is significant to address the existence of such a concept in this portion of the literature review.

The first deniers were the Nazis themselves. Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsfuhrer of the

*Schutzstaffel* (Final Solution: Overview, ushmm.org) and one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany ordered all concentration camp directors to destroy records, crematoria, buildings, and other physical evidence of concentration camps. In addition, all remaining prisoners were to be killed; this was the final attempt to destroy all evidence of the Nazi war against the Jews. The lack of evidence would make retelling this part of history more difficult. Mathis (2006) posits three denial tactics related to semantics, the use of language. They are: the over and under defining the Holocaust, extending the definition of the Holocaust over time, and the Two-Valued orientation. The under defining of the Holocaust relates to simple statements the average person may make, such as a statement related to how “Hitler gassed six-million Jews” (p. 54). This oversimplification is false because Hitler did not do any of the gassing himself, and not all six-million Jews were gassed; to believe otherwise is factually inaccurate. The over defining of the Holocaust refers to sensationalized information, such as the suggestion that the fat of dead Jews was used to make soap. While this is a sensational possibility, it is not a documented occurrence, although this does not mean that it may have not been an obscure occurrence by a Nazi or a collaborator in an attempt to recycle; it was not general practice. What is a fact is that the Nazis plundered Jewish belongings at every significant move (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg: A Policy of Plunder, ushmm.org). When people were moved (e.g., homes to ghettos, ghettos to concentration camps, trains to gas chambers), there were significant items that could be used either as recycled materials for the war effort (i.e., shaved human hair used in blankets, socks for German soldiers), or items were given to Germans who resettled areas vacated by Jews (e.g., homes, artwork, fur coats), to name a few. What should be understood is that the Holocaust was a “myriad of events” (p. 54) and over focusing on one sensational piece of information is not to do proper research or to teach the topic in a responsible way.

The second point that Mathis (2006) makes is that of extending the (Holocaust) definition without regarding that word meanings changed as time passed. For example, the term “Final Solution to the Jewish problem” at first was meant to determine how the Nazis would rid Germany of Jews. Before 1939, that way was through forced emigration. It was not until much later that mass killings occurred, carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads). The meaning of the Final Solution changes between 1935 and 1942 and has not always meant genocide. The teacher must research and understand Nazi euphemism and their abuse of language as a significant point of study.

The third point is the two-valued orientation. It is this type of rhetorical device that Mathis (2006) refers to as “black or white” (p. 59) or all or nothing. That is to say, if one can find one point of doubt, the entire argument is false. One of his examples, is the “No holes, no Holocaust” argument concerning Zyklon B (the poison used in shower exterminations) in one of the buildings of Auschwitz known as Krema II. Deniers state that if there were no holes, then no Zyklon B could have been delivered and then the millions of deaths claimed to have occurred at Auschwitz could not have happened, and therefore, none of the deaths or a considerably less amount of reported deaths occurred there or anywhere. Mathis (2006) provides an understanding of how language allows the “denial movement” to rely heavily on the ignorance of the average person. The teacher can work against simplistic thinking and encourage students to understand deeply and remember correctly, experiencing the curriculum with respect and accuracy.

Wiesel (Nobel Peace Prize speech, 1986) states that we should not forget; however, first the survivors had to learn how to talk about their experiences that had never been experienced prior to the Shoah. It is their learning, their healing from brokenness that has given us something to remember. Part of their healing began with learning to speak about their experiences.

### *Learning to Speak Helps Those to Endure*

In her recorded notes as a DP's camp counselor, Judith Hemmendinger cites an example of a healing situation via the displaced boys of Buchenwald (Displaced Persons, 2016), a group of about 1,000 boys that the Nazis housed in Buchenwald camp right before liberation (Hemmendinger, n.d.; "OSE Home for Jewish Boys," n.d.). Soon after liberation, the boys went to England, France, and Italy. The boys were housed in France by their age group and they fought all the time. Hemmendinger (n.d.) and the additional camp counselors realized that they would need to change mechanisms to help the boys adjust to freedom and decided to rearrange the boys' housing by hometown, without regard of their age. Still the boys exhibited the attitude of "closing up, numbing, and cessation of feelings" (Hemmendinger, n.d., p. 2). Hemmendinger and other counselors lived with 400 of the boys for several years in a rented French chateau until most of the boys reached age 18 and were adjudicated as adults. To speak German was to alienate the boys. Although themselves German, the boys did not speak the language, but German was the only language the counselors spoke. The camp personnel learned to speak Yiddish by listening to the boys and made an effort to learn the boys' names and take them outdoors. With their identity beginning to be restored, the boys began to communicate.

To deal with the boys' behavior of hoarding food, Hemmendinger left the kitchen doors open and told the boys they could help themselves. She made them feel as though they have a home as long as they do not disturb others. Near the end of 1947, the boys were forced to move out of the chateau and continue with their lives as many moved together in groups to Israel, America, Australia, Bolivia, and Canada, while some of them remained in France. Currently, those who are still alive meet together in their new adopted countries to keep their friendships alive. Hemmendinger states that not all survivors can speak of their survival, but other children



of Buchenwald like Wiesel, became vocal about their experiences through writing and speaking. Robert Waisman, a child survivor of Buchenwald and featured on the documentary, *Boys of Buchenwald* (Gill & Mehler, 2002), believed the boys needed all of their energy to start their families, but when the time was right, they recommitted themselves to their friendships and to speaking out against Holocaust atrocities.

### *The Personal History Embedded in Historical Trauma*

Life for surviving Jewish prisoners continued, despite being victimized by criticism and cynicism. Post liberation, survivors had no home and no economic resource; the DP camps were their only source of material sustenance. It is a fact that survivors married, had children, created schools, became professionals, singers, and tailors – among other life paths – in new sites because it was too dangerous to return to their old homes (Teaching about the Holocaust, 2001). But, no matter where survivors went in Europe or throughout the world, they were careful to tie themselves to community, and it was community that was their real source of sustenance (Teaching about the Holocaust, 2001).

In the decade that followed WWII, the extent of the Nazi perpetration against Jews dominated world consciousness after physical artifacts and testimonies at trial empirically demonstrated the genocide aimed at European Jews. The first use of the word Shoah was during the Nuremberg Trials of 1946-47 (Horowitz, 2009, p. 493). For the first time, the public was privy to Nazi war crimes after 22 political, economic, and military leaders were brought to trial and exposed in Nuremberg, Germany. A number of interpreters to translate for non-German speaking representatives of various countries were required. The International Military Tribunal (IMT) comprised of Allied countries and other occupied countries tried 22 Nazi defendants, the most famous being Hermann Goering. Goering was Hitler's deputy and head of the Luftwaffe,

the aerial warfare branch of the combined German Wehrmacht military forces during WWII, which Goering commanded beginning in 1935.

For the first time *crimes against humanity* were used to define behavior and planning that was so heinous that being at war was not a viable excuse. Of those sent to trial, 16 were found guilty of the worst accusation, Crimes Against Humanity, a term now used and identified by the International Criminal Court describes “acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, such as murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape, persecution, enforced disappearance, apartheid, serious bodily or mental injury” (War Crimes Trials, 2016). The Eichmann trial gave legitimacy to the claims made by witnesses.

### **Survivor Stories Become Believable: Teaching About Trauma**

Adolf Eichmann’s trial in 1960 is the second significant historical event that gave Jews and others a sense of openness to the truth of the Shoah atrocities. His capture acted as a catalyst for survivors to share their traumatic experiences. Eichmann was responsible for the following:

- He was in charge of the Final Solution, the Nazi’s attempt to kill all European Jews (“The Final Solution,” n.d.):
- He developed and administered all deportation plans to Nazi concentration and death camps;
- He was commander in charge of looting Jewish art, gold, and other valuables and appropriating them to state-owned property;
- He was the face of Jewish persecution, directly and indirectly responsible for all deaths of Nazi victims; and

- He was the leader of the Gestapo, Storm Troopers (SA) and Secret Service (SD) (Shuter, 2003, p. 41).

Immediately after Nazi Germany was defeated, Eichmann falsified his papers to elude capture, hiding for many years in Argentina, helped by Nazi *ratlines* – people who helped Nazis escape Europe (“The Search for Perpetrators,” n.d.). Captured by the Mossad, the Israeli secret service, Eichmann was tried and executed in Israel.

The Eichmann trial provided the initial court-documented evidence legitimizing survivor stories. Because of this new survivor legitimacy, the amount of people – survivors and others – telling their stories increased compared to the amount of accounts before Eichmann’s conviction. Littell (2014) reminds us that during the 1950s, American people were comfortable being ignorant of survivors’ experiences. However, in 1958 Wiesel published his book, *Night* (1958), and brought the Shoah into public consciousness (American Jewish Congress, 2016). Holocaust survivor Eva Unterman told me that around 1980, an area teacher asked Unterman to speak of her survival experiences and while resistant at first, she finally committed to speak to his class. Since that time, she has been speaking to area students about her experiences. She also began the Holocaust Council in her city and established the area Holocaust Committee to involve area teachers in teaching the Shoah. Unterman argues that children should not be burdened with her suffering and therefore, middle school students are the youngest with whom she will speak, since they are more developmentally ready to deal with the difficult subject of the Shoah. She carefully reminds that no one person reacts to trauma and grief in the same way (Unterman, E., personal communication, Nov. 14, 2014). Some survivors will openly talk about their experiences, whereas others will never speak of the horrors. She states that for those who do speak of this terrible time, survivors’ remembrance and testimony differ greatly and are highly individualized;

so are the ways in which survivors deal with their trauma. Also in the 1970s, Elie Wiesel, Irving Frank, Professor Yaffa Eliach, and others begin to talk openly about furthering the American consciousness of the Shoah and seeking long-lasting national awareness. These survivors' personal stories and experiences became an integral part of Holocaust education. The USHMM suggests that teachers must make this history personal to avoid trivialize it. I will also discuss this further in the pedagogical section of this literature review.

In support of preserving survivor stories and retaining artifacts, on Nov. 1, 1978, then U.S. President Jimmy Carter established the President's Commission on the Holocaust. The commission's task was to report on three issues: the creation of a memorial to Holocaust survivors; how the American people would maintain the memorial; and develop an annual nation-wide Holocaust commemoration. On Sept. 27, 1979, Chairman Elie Wiesel lobbied on behalf of the entire commission and recommended to Congress the formation of a national memorial museum, an educational foundation, and the Committee on Conscience. Congress unanimously approved the creation of the USHMM. The charter stipulated that the USHMM be built in Washington, D.C., on 1.9 acres of land adjacent to the National Mall. Private funds totaling US\$200 million paid for the museum structure, dedicated in 1993 (History of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org)). Today the museum operates with three main purposes: as a national Holocaust memorial, an educational foundation, and a commission on conscience that studies present-day genocidal conditions worldwide with the intent of providing vigilance and awareness to worldwide issues of persecution. The main task of the USHMM is to educate the public about the Holocaust, remember survivors and victims, and confront genocide and anti-Semitism (Anti-Semitism, [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org)).

Holocaust education provides support to an important American education tenet: Investigating the importance of responsible citizenship. Holocaust education supports democratic values that should be protected and valued. Recognizing the suffering of others and the violation of their civil rights demands action on our part; otherwise we risk becoming bystanders and collaborators (Teaching about the Holocaust: A resource book for Educators, History of the Holocaust: An Overview, 2001).

### **Stages of Evolution of Holocaust Studies**

Horowitz (2009) states that there appears to be four “operational stages that coexist in studying the Holocaust ...that lead to a more precise accounting of historical and analytical issues and these issues intersect at various times and levels” (p. 493). The first stage includes studying events, such as the Nuremberg trials that enlightened the world to the mass killings of people. Holocaust studies were the literature of the witnesses and their personal accounts and testimonies. The second operational stage is the historical and journalistic state in which memoirs were used as a source to understand the where, when, and how of the Holocaust (p. 495). The third stage is research that began post 1960, soon after the creation of the nation of Israel, and the researchers became very analytical. Researchers’ emphasis in applying scholarship was to determine policy and economic terms such as totalitarianism, fascism and to understand the predicament of Jewish people as the same threat that all free peoples face.

The fourth operational stage encompasses the previous three and in addition, deals with “discourse on the Holocaust of contemporary ethical theory and moral doctrine. This becomes the continuum for the study of human beings” (p. 496). Horowitz (2009) argues that in this stage the study of the Shoah makes other types of modern catastrophic events preventable because this type of conflict is seen through the lens of the Shoah and the probability and possibility of

genocide is evident. Scholars recognize, however, the complexity of microscopic analysis and indicate that it is this type that must be studied by a “post-survivor generation, one arguably less impacted by emotive considerations” (p. 497). It is in this stage that present Holocaust educators and scholars are situated to learn from all former stages, through discovery and discussion of the macroscopic historical issues and the microscopic issues that benefit from historical distance.

Are we far enough away from trauma? Berenbaum (2006) gave an example from the Biblical Old Testament of Lot and his family leaving the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:15-26, Amplified). During a speech he delivered at the museum in 2001, Berenbaum discussed this passage and a possible interpretation: The angel who rescued the family orders them not to look back at Sodom and Gomorrah lest they face consequences. Lot’s wife, however, cannot resist. She disobeys the angel’s order, looks back, and consequently becomes a pillar of salt. Berenbaum (2006) states that looking back too soon upon catastrophe can demolish a person. Survivors who are willing to tell their stories have the vantage of being eyewitnesses and sharing their remembrances of the Holocaust will not damage them. Unterman, a survivor and educator, thinks the tragic events of more than 50 years ago are an important part of our collective consciousness, one that needs witness (Unterman, E., personal conversation, November, 2014). The necessity of detailed retrospective examination from a distance is imperative, given the added impetus that those in the first-generation of survivors are dying out. Teachers, through Holocaust education will continue their story.

### **Pedagogy within Holocaust Education**

Donnelly's (2006) quantitative survey of 327 secondary English and social studies teachers shows that these teachers felt the Holocaust's lessons were "powerful and pertinent to students" and most teachers who receive training are more likely to teach the subject and spend more time on it (p. 51). The survey also shows the Holocaust is being taught, but there is room for growth in Holocaust education (p. 51). Additionally, teachers reported human rights as the most significant from which to teach about the Holocaust. Comparatively, teachers who decided not to teach Holocaust education report being ill prepared as the most significant reason (p. 51). Being prepared includes pedagogical preparation and good decision-making concerning pedagogical choices. Teachers who are engaged pedagogues, are as Noddings (1981) describes, relational teachers. They are engaged with students through understanding students as people and making content meaningful to these students. Therefore, the teacher is an integral part of the learning process, first by understanding the content and then by teaching students about content by making it relevant to them and students grow through extended contact with the teacher and the subject.

I will start with the notion of pedagogy. It is usually defined as method and practice of teaching, and yet van Manen (1994) argues for mediation between the written curriculum with lived history and students with lived experiences. For example, the pedagogue (teacher) is a key component in building relationship between the content and with the child (the learner). In this case, the teacher brings together the history and the human experience in an effort to facilitate their students' interaction with Holocaust education. Additionally, teachers bring multiple layers of life experience into teaching and I understood these connections to pedagogy.

USHMM suggests teachers examine their rationales for teaching about the Holocaust. Students may raise questions concerning fairness, justice, identity, peer pressure, conformity, indifference and obedience when learning about it (Teaching about the Holocaust, 2001, p. 2). Leyman and Harris (2013) ask: “Will [teachers] help students engage with a simple analysis of facts and figures or is there the possibility of educating students to help prevent possible future atrocities?” This question is important for teachers to think about in developing a deeper teaching purpose and rationale. The teachers’ engagement develops the teachers’ ability to teach differently while developing understanding within oneself and encouraging complex learning for students. Lindquist (2008) reminds us there are four factors that should be considered in any teaching content consideration: The importance and significance of the content for the particular academic setting; the “learnability” of the content by the students who will receive the instruction; the appropriateness of the content for the students; and the consistency of the content with the culture in which it will be taught as previously stated. Teachers must first engage with the topic of the Holocaust. Their possible continuation with teaching this topic happens as their own learning expands and they develop a cognitive understanding of history.

USHMM suggests that the history of the Holocaust is necessary to any lesson related to the Holocaust. Students should then understand three basic things: Democratic institutions are not automatic, silence to the suffering of others perpetuates this suffering, and the Holocaust was not an accident, but rather a result of complex choices that ultimately led to mass murder (Teaching about the Holocaust, 2001, p. 1). The following are pedagogical considerations the museum suggests:

1. Define the term “Holocaust;”
2. Avoid comparison of pain;



3. Avoid simple answers to complex history;
4. Understand that the Holocaust was not inevitable;
5. Strive for precision of language;
6. Make careful distinction about sources;
7. Avoid stereotypical descriptions;
8. Do not romanticize history;
9. Contextualize the history you are teaching;
10. Translate statistics into people;
11. Be sensitive to appropriately written and audiovisual material;
12. Strive for balance;
13. Select appropriate learning activities; and
14. Reinforce objectives in your lesson plan.

Based on these suggestions, scholars' research and teachers' own experiences, in this section, I will discuss several important issues related to teaching Holocaust studies to students.

### **Defining the Shoah**

Lindquist (2013) suggests students are often familiar with the word "Holocaust," yet their information is "incorrect or incomplete" (p. 32), and therefore, he recommends teachers first define the word Holocaust appropriately using the official definition of this term. Students should understand a more accurate definition before studying the "origin, evolution, and outcome" (p. 32) of the Shoah. Garber (2004) argues for carefully taught language and recommends that those who teach and study the Holocaust also attend to the selection of the words. The official definition is as follows:

The Holocaust was the systematic, genocidal event in 20th-century history: The state sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims – six million were murdered: Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny. Russians, and other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals ("Introduction to the Holocaust," n.d.).

In addition to the understanding of the official definition, the teacher should "activate prior knowledge" (Lindquist, 2013, p. 32) to determine the "learners' preexisting attitudes, experiences, and knowledge" and should establish this "before studying its origin, evolution, and outcome" of the Holocaust (p. 32). Lindquist (2013) states that what a student already knows or thinks he or she knows is the single most important factor in the future learning. During this phase, the teacher can ascertain students' misconceptions and adjust, clarify, and re-teach. Lindquist (2013) warns that student content misconceptions must be clarified, challenged, and changed to broaden students' understanding. Several of the following questions are considered as fundamental to rethinking the definition. They are listed as follows: What was the Holocaust? What was its structure? When did it occur? By who was it conducted? Against what groups was it directed? Why were these groups targeted? What was the intended goal (the desired extent) of the policy directed against each group?

Teaching and learning additional vocabulary should be discussed, taught, and introduced because the terms will assist students in processing answers to the above questions. The suggested basic vocabulary is: victims, perpetrators, bystanders, upstanders, collaborators, ideology, rationales, motivations, extent, and objectives. Linquist (2013) proceeds to suggest a six-stage lesson that is foundational to basic understanding that teachers can use to help students begin to engage with this topic:

**Stage 1:** Using the official definition of the Shoah, students will work alone to write their own personal definition of the Holocaust. Students can use paragraph forms, bulleted lists or graphic organizers, and will retain their paragraph throughout the unit.

**Stage 2:** The teacher will utilize group work. Students are assigned to groups that work on answering each question posed in the previous paragraph concerning basic understanding about the Holocaust and writing their definition. Students will engage in discussion to determine their definition. The teacher must exhibit his or her own judgment when assigning groups, listening to student conversations, and determining accuracy of responses.

**Stage 3:** The lesson is more teacher-directed because the teacher will lead a discussion by asking students why they fashioned their answers a certain way to questions in stage 2. During this stage, students collect and highlight correct information by starting with reputable sources, refining their written language.

**Stage 4:** Each student compares and contrasts his or her definition with the correct information that remains from the posted collaborative ones (stage 2) and reworks his or her own definition. These definitions can be displayed in different ways.

**Stage 5:** The teacher asks several students to share their definitions. The teacher is looking for mostly accurate definitions to be shared and corrects any faulty information.

**Stage 6:** The official definition is given only at this stage. Students compare their definition drafts to that of the official definition. There may be discussion that ensues. Once this stage is complete, the Holocaust unit can commence.

This foundational lesson encourages students to use their own knowledge and then refine it as they critically analyze their own language and form deeper connections (Lindquist, 2013, p. 34). In addition, a variety of audiences can benefit from this method including all middle and high school age students, pre- and in-service teachers, and community members. The lesson activates the participants' questions and comments and increases participants' engagement (p. 35). Teachers must ask themselves: What will students gain from this history? Scholars generally agree that teachers must have fundamental knowledge of the Shoah, even going so far as to recommend only using the word *Shoah* in teaching the Holocaust because of its specific historical meaning (Garber, 2004). The use of this term could mean that teachers understand the implication of carefully selected vocabulary and teach these meanings to their students, who in turn, will carefully use selected vocabulary when discussing their newly acquired knowledge. The caution here is to avoid flippant, colloquial vocabulary that trivializes the complexity of the Shoah and all related historical issues and implications. Teachers must carefully preplan their unit (i.e., teaching materials, objectives and goals) and incorporate creative methods through which to teach (Leyman & Harris, 2013). Literature suggests content decision-making that includes interdisciplinary units and case study (Lindquist, 2008) and dialogical considerations that enable student ownership (Conway, 2011). Conway (2011) argues that her many years of teaching high school in England always included a pre-assessment of what students know about the Holocaust and using this, a teacher could likely further develop the students' inquiry skills. Misco (2009) recommends that teachers use actual events and people to help students engage

concretely with “complex features of the Holocaust” (p. 14). Magilow (2007) recommends that teachers teach through activities that require deep reflection, public debate, and community building.

### Avoiding Simple Answers to Complex History

Schweber (2006) determines that the teacher must plan by selecting what is taught during the unit. In addition, the teacher must reflect and be a student of the work so that the teaching does not accidentally lead to Holocaust trivialization by oversimplifying complex issues. She explains that a combination of the lack of reverence for the topic and a lack of understanding may lead to such trivialization. She gives an example that happened in her own classroom, where her college students planned to demonstrate their learning. They planned to play a Holocaust jeopardy in which students receive candy when they know questions to, “What is Zyklon B?” (p. 48). Singular activities such as these, trivialize the Holocaust; to superficially deal with the subject is potentially as detrimental as not teaching it at all. She also warns teachers against *Holocaust sacralization* – not being able to talk about the Holocaust because it is felt the Holocaust is too sacred (p. 48). Polarization of the topic, or forcing students to feel or respond in one way can also impede their understanding; therefore, the teacher must be sensitive to these possibilities. Totten and Feinberg (2001) and Lindquist (2011) warn the educator against simulations as they often lead to trivialization of serious issues such as prolonged suffering. Do you actually understand suffering by pretending to be someone else for one hour? In addition, they are “anti-intellectual and disingenuous” (Totten as cited in Lindquist, 2011). Schweber (2006) suggests a teacher’s choice to use simulation is “questionable and possibly detrimental” (p. 51).

Schweber (2006) informs us of the possibility that even the less-risky pedagogical options, if taught in a shallow, over-generalized way will result in pitfalls that prevent students from understanding the complexity of the Holocaust as a historical event. She cites one of her studies that uncover the tendency of teachers to over generalize and minimize the larger processes (i.e., teachers she studied glossed over the role of church-based anti-Semitism). This kind of omission in parochial or faith-based schools may lead people to say, “Jews who died in the Holocaust...were killed for no reason at all” (p. 169), but this disregards larger issues of long-standing prejudice and persecution involved in systematic and bureaucracy that supported a policy of hate.

Another issue that situates Holocaust education in complexity is to relate it to racial hatred and anti-Semitism occurring in present day. Cowan and Maitles (2007) argue that Holocaust education will not eradicate all prejudice and racism, but could “inoculate the general population against racism and anti-Semitism” (p. 117), increasing sensitivity to human issues of suffering and injustice. Teachers must also understand inherent U.S. political issues. For example, the Holocaust would eventually discredit the Eugenics program otherwise known as scientific racism, which was prevalent in the world. This ideology fueled all forms of propaganda to underscore the racial superiority of the white race; this idea was prevalent in Nazi Germany and in other European countries (Science as Salvation: Weimar Eugenics, [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org)). Teachers can underscore: The U.S. was also deeply involved with racial profiling and as much as that time in history would allow, genetic selection (Berenbaum, 2006). Additionally, the Holocaust has become a convenient truth for an institutionalized curriculum and political propaganda in which Holocaust education is cited as significant to eradicate racism and prejudice, while the U.S. government fails to act to demonstrate this understanding (i.e., the lack of the U.S. government

to intervene in the mass murders in Rwanda because our national security was not directly threatened) (Cowan & Maitles, 2007, p. 117). In other words, teachers can look to the Shoah while neglecting those conditions of hatred and genocide that exist today. For teachers to knowledgably teach, we must “know where you stand as a teacher; what your lessons are; and where you draw the boundaries between over generalizing and over specifying” (Cowan & Maitles, 2007, p. 54). For the teacher to understand and teach lessons about the Holocaust, they must begin by examining and educating themselves about larger concepts such as anti-Semitism, which may give them the ability to teach students with a greater understanding of historical issues that affect the Shoah. The teacher must be aware of “countervailing impact of policy areas such as economic policy, and housing policy, and scaremongering while embracing the positive aspects of Holocaust education: Human rights, mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding diversity” (Cowan & Maitles, 2007, p. 117).

### **Pedagogical Choices and Strategies for Complex Teaching**

The relationship between the teacher, the curriculum, and the student is key to achieve a close relationship in which students grow morally and intellectually. These connections are key to improving and sustaining student engagement (Noddings, 1981). Teachers need to make sound pedagogical choices and use effective strategies for engaging students’ learning of a difficult subject. In Holocaust education, different pedagogical strategies and considerations for how to choose and use various teaching materials are explored and studied. In this section I briefly overview pedagogical strategies, which are themselves complex, if taught with finesse can lead to learning that is deep and thoughtful.

### *Simulation*

There are different perspectives on the use of simulation in Holocaust education. Some educators believe that simulation can encourage students' engagement with learning (Ben-Peretz (2003). Others such as Totten, Feinberg, and Fernekes (2001) discourage the use of simulations in which students act out situations that victims faced. Because the undesirable outcome is that students will go about their lives after the simulation is over and the complexity of events and actions are over-simplified (p. 13). Ben-Peretz (2003) argues that simulation, as a pedagogical choice alone, is not the issue, rather it is the lack of a "holistic approach to teaching" (p. 190) that minimalizes the learning. In other words, the teacher must understand that the simulation is not interpreted as a game and that teachers may use other interactive teaching that brings depth of knowledge to learning. Ben Peretz discovers, in her interview of students involved, that they were able to find deeper meaning in their role in a simulation, because the students realized they were learning beyond "lookin' in books" (p. 191) and are engaged. However, teachers should be careful that students understand they cannot understand by pretending to be a prisoner, just like they cannot understand starvation by skipping lunch. Even though simulation may provide catharsis, such as an experience that is genuinely felt and intelligently understood, teachers must help students to clarify their experience in a broad context.

### *Memorial Collecting*

Memorial Collecting is another pedagogical strategy under contestation. There are widely-used projects in which collection is involved that include: The Houston Holocaust Museum's quest to collect 1.5 million handmade paper butterflies, the Button Project sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Peoria, Illinois, or other projects to collect six million of memorial items and our local museum collecting millions of small stones for every child killed. However, a



collecting project by the Children's Holocaust Memorial in Whitwell, Tennessee, drew criticism. In that project, students attempted to collect 11 million paperclips (altogether, 25 million were collected) to answer the initial inquiry question, "How much is 11 million?" (Magilow, 2007, p. 24). Critics pointed out that this type of memorializing allows students and others to "engage genocide in a childish way;" it was a cheapening of the Shoah by hoarding, a "commodity fetishism" (p. 26) or Holocaust "kitsch(y)," too common and without deep value, exploiting the pain of others (p. 30).

Another negative possibility with regard to the collection of *things* is that this act cannot represent the human suffering of the Shoah. This type of collecting could cause people to view each individual's suffering as part of a whole and because they are represented by everyday items, the things that seem disposable, such an activity gives the Shoah an over generalized impression in which "properties of concrete objects are given to abstractions" (p. 29). However, Magilow (2007) argues for another possibility that people can become emotionally engaged through the task of collecting. Although there is no real connection between Jews and paperclips, there is "significance" in the meaning drawn between the everyday item similar to a button or a penny and collecting acts as engagement toward thinking about more complex issues. The collected items (i.e., pennies and paperclips) become a "medium of memory" and collecting them becomes a "learning experience" of historical construction for participants.

### *Case Study*

Literature consistently cautions against the over generalization of Holocaust learning and therefore Misco (2009) suggests that the superficial treatment of all Holocaust issues is incorrect pedagogy. Rather, he promotes case study: The careful selection of historical segments that are key to Holocaust understanding. For example, the teacher may select the case of the implication

of the Holocaust in Latvia to concentrate a majority of the allotted class time on what Misco (2009) calls “nuanced investigations of victims, perpetrators, rescuers, bystanders, collaborators and the gray areas between roles” (p. 15). This type of learning would occur after a basic pre-Holocaust unit. Investigating roles can be emotional for students because describing roles and relating them to oneself is intensely personal, however, this type of learning and curriculum choice encourages students to learn about specific places and individuals, rather than only global ideas (i.e., unspecific, general topics). Teachers add to complexity in teaching when they encourage students to be active in the selection and presentation of the content.

### *Student-led Learning*

Conway (2011) promotes independence and creativity as the goal for teaching and uses a Holocaust unit as an example of student-led learning. In Conway’s (2011) study, high school students have some leadership and direction over their learning, which supports Leyman and Harris’ (2013) position that pedagogy should encourage students to think, write, argue, and persuade through dialogical methods. Additionally, teachers can negotiate topics learned and learning outcomes (e.g., assessments, projects, etc.). Sutton (1992, as cited in Ben-Peretz 1003, p. 191) claims “negotiation” is a teaching style in which individuals form action plans in which the learner has more responsibility. Conway’s (2011) study illuminates that teachers’ roles shift from only instructional to facilitative, supportive, and advisory roles in student-led learning. The school academic unit (department) planned for their year nine (11th-graders in U.S. schools) an inquiry unit through project-based learning using Bloom’s Taxonomy (e.g., different levels of thinking). The group planned and outlined project details with a criteria sheet for students. The teachers began their teaching with what they considered to be key facts and figures, and carefully selected images and created PowerPoints with the intention of evoking curiosity in students. As

an example of facts shared with students, the teacher told students, “During the Holocaust, at least 1.5 million children were murdered” (p. 53). After being told this, students completed at their own pace the tasks necessary to facilitate the organization of their work (i.e., typing responses into documents for easy access). Students are taught to write and ask key questions that will drive their research. After the brainstorming, they will meet in groups, delete repeated statements, and determine what they know from reliable sources. Additionally, they will determine what teacher assistance they will need as they progress through their reflective art project.

The students’ next challenge is to create an original Holocaust memorial model. During this time students continue to ask questions, research, and receive lessons from the teachers. Developing this type of work with students required teachers to plan, improve the practice, and hone the process even as it was implemented, making the reflection of one year’s work vital to the improvement for the next year. Interested teachers ask themselves, “Could I possibly do less in this lesson, and the students more?” (Conway, 2011, p. 56). Students also reflect on their learning by answering for themselves how successful they thought the lesson was. Student ownership opens other aspects that increase engagement through creativity and emotional connection because students have more ownership of their learning as the teacher offers additional pedagogical guidance.

### *Pedagogical Choices of Various Teaching Materials*

Lindquist (2008) reiterates the teacher must ensure historical accuracy when selecting the specific topics, specific and general teaching materials, including graphic materials (i.e., maps, charts, and graphs). Many teachers opt to begin their planning with reliable repositories, (e.g., the USHMM and Yad Vashem in Israel) in selecting text, film and other graphic materials; however,

a visit to the museum does not take the place of school-based Holocaust education (Maitles & Cowan, 2012). One must be careful of the “denier phenomenon” (p. 27). Requiring students who know very little accurate information to do an unguided search of the Internet is not recommended. In addition, textbooks provide very little information about the Holocaust, necessitating a search for knowledge elsewhere. Selected Holocaust literature must also be vetted “so that historical accuracy is maintained... by asking: How do you determine whether the fiction is valid?” (p. 28). Educators should be aware of nuanced differences between history and historical fiction (Lindquist, 2008). For example, the historical fiction, *Daniel’s Story* appears in print and is a display at the USHMM. It is based on a fictional person, but contextually accurate. Without guidance, teachers and students may believe that Daniel is a real person; Lindquist (2008) posits that this is the type of “circumstance that must be handled with care” (p. 28).

Using survivors’ stories carries the same weight of historical accuracy, one in which the teacher must be knowledgeable to navigate with students because survivors’ stories may include their own view (each survivor’s recollection) that differs from historical factual occurrences. Time and distance may have shifted the survivors’ perspective. This results in many truths that emerge (Morris, 2001, p. 117). Lindquist (2008) states that confusion between historical fact and personal interpretation can be avoided if teachers first establish a substantial core of historical knowledge before introducing survivor stories. This requires teachers to update their knowledge through reliable professional development.

Graphical teaching material (i.e., still imagery, film and video) must be selected with care so as not to over sensationalize the teaching, and therefore as Lindquist (2008) warns, exploiting “students’ emotional vulnerability” (p. 32). The teacher should locate a balance when selecting materials that are appropriate for the students’ level. The point is to use visual materials that are

“historically contextualized and controlled” and conversely not to shock students into a “seduction of horror” by only using pictures of corpses in death camps (Lindquist, 2008, p. 32). Teachers can encourage students to see the “humanity of the victims and what happened to them as individuals ... (and must facilitate their response as) individual interpreters of the material” because each person and class is different and will respond differently to the study (p. 32). Rosenstone (as cited in Lindquist, 2011) suggests film or video is important to teaching history and the teacher must do so carefully, making judgments of artistic interpretation and historical accuracy or risk “inaccurate viewpoints” (p. 120). It is essential the chosen film use honest and precise images of shown documents. The teacher should consider the following factors: The historical accuracy of the work and how much dramatization should be tolerated within the work.

“Judicious choices” in dealing with the horrors of the Shoah are crucial to an appropriate confrontation of Holocaust issues, and so the educator is cautioned to select information (i.e., art and film) that is not too graphic (Jordan, 2004, p. 199). Jordon (2004) suggests the use of children’s literature because it is less threatening and may not be emotionally overwhelming to students as the start to a teaching unit. I use the following children’s book, *The Cat with the Yellow Star Coming of Age in Terezin*, by Susan Goldman Rubin with Ela Weissberger (2006), as an example. I have met Weissberger, and the book is accurate to her account of her childhood experiences of Terezin, Czechoslovakia. It chronicles Weissberger’s life during her imprisonment in Terezin through 35 pages of large print and includes selected photos.

The book contains enough information for historical context and uses the specific case of Terezin (in German: Theresienstadt), used as a model camp by the Nazis. The Jewish Council of Elders was ordered to set up “homes” for children and Weissberger was taken away from her mother and forced to live in one of these. Occupied by many artists, one of them – Ella Pollak –

became Weissberger's caretaker and she taught the girls to sing, do simple art together, and they learned and performed the children's opera, *Brundibar*. There was symbolism within the opera: The end of the opera concludes when the mice overtake the cat, Brundibar. The message of hope was translated to the crowd and became a hopeful message to all that they could survive another day. In the case of Weissberger, the camp in which she was being held eventually begins the liquidation process (a euphemism meaning everyone was supposed to be murdered using a variety of methods; shot, starved or marched to death), but allied American soldiers liberate the camp before she could be liquidated. It is important that children be taught examples of resistance as survival, as they will often ask, "Why didn't Jews fight the Nazis?" Stories like that of Weissberger provide students a deeper understanding of a complex issue.

Mohr and McLean (2000) highlight a teacher – Theresa Manchey – who integrates drawing in her English class because it helps students to see connections and recognize large concepts while reading text, and this aids in memory. Students can use the concrete process of drawing to aid the abstractions of thinking and to process through difficult vocabulary that in turn will assist their verbalizations. Children's literature relies heavily on the integration of visual art and text.

Holocaust survivor in-person testimony is quickly becoming a non-option because first-generation survivors are dying out. However, imaged (film, video, and digital) testimony (i.e., Steven Spielberg's *Shoah Project*) can be used instead (Maitles & Cowan, 2012). Baron (2010) cites the Production Code of America (PCA), established in 1934, in writing about what he calls the first wave of American Holocaust films produced from 1945 to 1959. PCA governed-films during this time period, by threat of disallowing the public airing of any film it deemed inappropriate – censorship – in essence regulated *how* filmmakers could portray violence. As a

result of PCA censorship, Holocaust films of the time period concentrated on uplifting narration, but are over generalized or perhaps too simplistic. Later films, such as *The Pawnbroker*, *The Odessa File* in 1974 and *Schindler's List* in 1993 contain more realistic complexity and less of the simplistic good-guys versus bad-guys portrayal of events, people, and cases (p. 113). When using films to teach, teachers need to consider multiple aspects of their pedagogical potential.

### *Blogging and the Use of Technology*

Special consideration may be given to today's student, since "the average American high school student spends a lot of time on their mobile phones watching videos, searching the Internet and ... on social media" (Nowell, 2014, p. 110). Stevens and Brown (2011) utilized the subject of the Holocaust and the Internet because it gives teachers access to a plethora of images, text, and other materials. They chose the Holocaust because it is an effective medium to develop knowledge and critical cultural awareness for teaching sensitive topics and social justice (Calandra, Fitzpatrick & Barron, 2008, as cited in Stevens & Brown, 2011, p. 34). With regard to promoting critical literacy with technology, Stevens and Brown (2011) determined that teachers recognize the importance of teaching students that not everything on the Internet is true and students must be critical in the sources they access and read for information, since there is a large amount of "denial" information readily available on the web. The use of technology, in this case, blogging lent a collaborative space for students to engage with each other to learn about Holocaust-related issues. Yet, the teacher or instructor must be knowledgeable before sending students to do electronic searches and inform students of possible misinformation, misconceptions and even false claims as made by Holocaust deniers.

There are many methods and a plethora of information a teacher can consider when teaching the Holocaust, therefore, the importance of the teacher who will make these curriculum

choices is significant. By first being introduced to content and various methods of teaching and experiencing the content, the teacher has pedagogical responsibility to bridge this difficult content for students at first through his or her own learning and engagement. They build stamina for research, study, and engagement through the curriculum choices made with students they teach in mind and then encouraging students to continue learning about areas not directly taught to students.

### **Teachers' Engagement with Difficult Subjects**

I will begin this section with a negative example, illuminated by research, of teaching resulting in simplistic and incorrect learning. Schweber's (2008) study yielded interesting discoveries about the teacher's teaching and lack of historical context of Holocaust issues. The teacher in the study misunderstands how "Americanized master narratives" influence the larger historical context, resulting in poorly taught and unrelatable lessons. The yeshiva (Orthodox Jewish religious school) schoolgirls taught by the teacher in the study were not exposed to background knowledge important to understanding the Shoah. Prior to their lessons, they had not seen any Holocaust movies, still imagery, or much television. What they did know was learned from familial connections because someone in their family was a Holocaust survivor; however, their knowledge was "sketchy, vague, and abstract" (p. 162). The teacher did little to explain or anchor unit experiences to historical or larger concepts, and does not respond to students' questions, resulting in furthering misconceptions and over-simplified understanding. When students interact with a guest speaker, Marion Lazan, they determine that some people lost their faith after experiencing difficult circumstances, but they come to this conclusion on their own with no prompting or questioning from their teacher. For example, during the teaching on hidden children, the teacher explains that some Jewish children had to say Catholic prayers to appear as



though they are members of the Catholic faith. The teacher asks, “Is that okay?” (p. 163). At first the children answer with a resounding no. However, after a loud interchange, they make an attempt to convey deeper answers. But the teacher does not guide students into further discussion and therefore, the students are left to make sense on their own and the teacher is unaware if students have engaged with deep learning or what they have learned at all.

Schweber (2008) states that in this case the teaching of the Holocaust dips into mysticism because no questions are answered. The teacher’s lack of prior Holocaust knowledge “repeatedly revealed itself” (p. 168) in her actions. She was unprepared, uninvolved, and uninformed, lacking in life experience as evidenced by her lack of content knowledge. The girls’ worldview was narrowed due to the teacher’s pedagogy resulting in a damaging and violent curriculum because students created conclusions that blamed victims for their suffering rather than create empathy for the human condition. It is possible that the teacher’s lack of awareness is the reason for student’s lack of learning. Literature supports that the teacher who is connected to the topic of the Holocaust through deep understanding of oneself and the content can teach well. I discuss several examples in the following paragraphs of teachers and professors who engage with Holocaust education.

#### *Personal History and Familial Conditions*

Feinstein (2004), a professor and Holocaust educator, discusses his connection to Holocaust as experiential and familial. He has Jewish relatives and was educated in school by teachers who discussed European history and that of WWII. Later, after finishing an advanced degree, he took his college students on yearly trips to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). He states that his initial connection to Holocaust education was rooted in his study and understanding of European history. Because of his particular understanding, he is suspicious of

making Holocaust education a mandatory course for pre-service teachers because he feels that taking a course often gives students the illusion that they are experts. In other words, Holocaust education must be situated in a historical and cultural study of humanity, a study of anti-Semitism and “otherness” (p. 57). His own life experiences in learning develop his connection with Holocaust education.

Grob (2004), also a college professor and scholar, recounts that his connection to Holocaust education seems to come from his upbringing and the lack of connection with his father, the only family member to escape Europe because he emigrated before the Nazi persecution. His father died when Grob (2004) was still in his 20s, but while living, his father desired to return to Stanislav, Ukraine to visit the family village to... “weep on the soil where my family was murdered” (p. 83). Grob (2004) makes this trip for his father. He does so during a time when he has raised his own children and begins to feel the intense absence of his father. He traveled to Stanislav and touched the old family home walls, attached names of dead relatives to flower stems, and left these as a memorial. He visited the cemetery where some family members are buried in unmarked graves and weeps for them too, fulfilling his father’s wish. Upon returning to the U.S., to Grob (2004) “it becomes clear ...that [he should] devote the rest of his scholarly career to Holocaust studies to ‘forge bonds with my father’” (p. 83). Both Grob (2004) and Feinstein (2004) connect the influence of family situations and their ability to connect to Holocaust education at an emotional as well as academic level.

The teacher, who engages with a difficult subject over time, can develop a commitment and create a sense of personal identity. My study adds to what Thorburn (2011) states as a relatively unknown area of research, which is teachers’ lives who teach Holocaust education, especially those who have remained in teaching even after professional and personal difficulty.

Cohen (2009) states that relatively little has been discovered about veteran teachers' careers and how they continue in their professions over decades and sustain excitement about their work. This type of teacher commitment benefits students, other teachers, and the schools in which these teachers work. Thorburn (2011) suggests we must know more about teacher engagement and resilience or face a "disappointing omission" (p. 329) as it pertains to teacher morale and professionalism. He pursues this understanding through the life history method. His study of a veteran Scottish teacher reveals the importance of "hardiness" in any teacher (Thorburn, 2011, p. 330), which characterizes high levels of commitment and the ability to be "comfortable with challenges" (p. 330). In my study I address how the teachers' life experiences influences their commitment and approaches to Holocaust education. In other words, what is it in a teacher's life that adds to their understanding of the Holocaust and developing hardiness to withstand personal and professional difficulty as they undergird their commitment to Holocaust education? One possible way of viewing teacher experience in connection with Holocaust education is what McDonald (2008) discusses: The Epiphanic experience.

McDonald (2008) uses narrative inquiry to explore the life history of five participants and the concept of epiphanic experience. Epiphany is a "sudden and abrupt insights and/or changes in perspective that transform the individual's concept of self and identity through the creation of new meaning in the individual's life (McDonald, 2008, p. 90) Using a narrative analysis matrix (Lieblisch, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber as cited in McDonald, 2008, p. 93) he describes the six characteristics of an epiphanic experience:

1. Antecedent state: Epiphany is preceded by periods of anxiety, depression, or inner turmoil;
2. Suddenness: Epiphany is sudden and abrupt;

3. Personal transformation: Epiphany is an experience of profound change;
4. Illumination/insight: Epiphany is acute awareness of something new, perhaps previously blind to;
5. Meaning making: Epiphany is profound insight because it is significant to the individual; and
6. Enduring nature: The epiphany is momentary, but the personal transformation is permanent and lasting.

The discomfort felt by any teacher learning about Holocaust issues for the first time could possibly be seen as the antecedent state in an epiphany, leading to a surprise discovery that begins a serious transformation for the teacher, one whose personal experiences aids in positive continuance, resulting in commitment to Holocaust education.

The teacher is significant as one who takes part in the learning of difficult subjects to address “historical trauma,” (Wang, 2009, p. 82) and makes learning of it a possibility for students. Wang (2014) points out “experiences alone do not lead to insight, but without them it is difficult for new thoughts to emerge” (p. 161). Wang (2009) discusses her work with teachers, enrolled in the graduate classes, and how students grapple and deal with the subject of the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. The Tulsa Race Riot is the historical event in which the “African American community in Tulsa was destroyed by white mobs” (Wang, 2009, p. 79). Undoubtedly the riot is initially a negative and uncomfortable curriculum topic, and yet the majority of her students persevere to learn from it, despite it being a difficult subject. Most of her students, all enrolled in Tulsa at an Oklahoma-based public university, are shocked to discover they did not fully understand the significance of this historical trauma in the city in which most of them are residents and actually on the very site where they are attending class. The university is built in

Greenwood, the section of town during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century once called “The Black Wall Street” (“Wormser,” n.d.). This area of Tulsa was once a vibrant, prosperous part of the city that now is quite diminished. To understand what happened in their backyard was a powerful and deeply emotional educational experience for these teachers, and ironically, in this case, through their lack of knowledge about their local history. Students write about how they connect their own life experiences with learning this difficult curriculum topic from their own subjective positioning as educators (Johnson & Hahn, 2009). As a teacher educator, Wang’s (2009, 2014) own cross-cultural journey has contributed to her particular pedagogical approaches.

Goodson (1992) posits that studying teacher’s lives is significant to research because it “listens to the teacher’s voice” (p. 10). This act of listening works to keep teachers’ lives as part of education and works against “returning them to the shadows” (p. 10), adding to the reconceptualization of educational research. The teacher’s voice is important because it “carries the tone, the language, the quality, and the feelings that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes” and in a way, this notion gives weight to the “right to speak and be represented,” individually and collectively (p. 11). Goodson (1992) argues for additional justifications for teacher story: studying teachers’ lives gives voice to a group that has been ‘historically marginalized’ (p. 15). However, “much truth resides in the margins” (p. 15). He believes that teachers’ stories involve their “personal and biographical factors” (p. 16) that affect teachers’ careers and commitments. Ayers and Schubert (1994) refer to teaching as “reflective practice, as an art, or as a narrative” (as citing Pinar & Grumet, p. 106). Ayers and Schubert (1994) posit that a thoughtful teacher is functioning within a complex world and teachers draw on the experiences of each other to learn and frame their own thoughts and teaching. In addition, teachers as human beings are connected by their own unique context and interpret data, conversations, and

experiences differently. Teachers, themselves, bring multiple interpretations to the interpretive process (p. 110). Teachers involved in reflective writing about difficult subject matters, like Tulsa Race Riot, have become more aware of themselves as humans, and as teachers at the intersection of the study of difficult content.

Ahmad (2009) relates her experience as a marginalized Arab woman and her responses to it as an educator. Ahmad (2009) wonders if seeing oneself as a “stranger to the mainstream culture” allows others to develop their intercultural understanding and global awareness” (p. 109) and this view of the self leads people to open up to the others’ story. Ahmad (2009) dwells within the in-between space to dialogue with Dr. Xin Li through her book, *The Tao of Life Stories* (2002), to reach further understanding of herself. As a result of critically reflecting on her life experience, Ahmad (2009) initiated and worked on establishing an Arabic language and culture class at a university. Her journey in life contributed to her advocacy and commitment as an educator, her engaging teaching practice, and students’ access and learning of another language and culture.

Nowell (2009) states the ability to see the “interdependence of humankind” requires that we rely on and respect each other. She relates a story in which she incorporates her developing understanding of “race as societal label... and not scientific” (p. 97). She states cultural awareness and education of herself as significant to her expanding her understanding of others. She states her openness to a life experience that she labels an epiphany, occurred at the Greenwood Cultural Center, a museum-like space located in the city of which she writes. This activity expanded her ability to accept the realities of older black people, a reality she did not share beforehand due to cultural and historical differences, even though she identifies as a black woman.

Nowell (2009) argues that the human relations approach “engenders feelings among all students and increases their learning experiences” (p. 95). This means students and teachers no longer see a neutral position that was taken as innocent or perceived as such. They may see their neutrality as complicit with the very thing despised about this historical event, in this case the Tulsa Race Riot; in the case of this paper, it may be the ignorance concerning anything Holocaust related, such as the lack of U.S. involvement in rescuing the Jews or the freely accepted stance of anti-Semitism (Anti-Semitism, 2016) by U.S. government officials and business leaders (i.e., Henry Ford). Nowell’s (2009) own life history leads her to acceptance of a gender-balanced curriculum in response to her experiences with “Blackness, (and having a) ...female voice... Southern” (in culture), she learns to value the culture of others as she does her own (p. 97).

Smythe (2009) proposes that he found himself on a shared intercultural path due to his experiences of working with international students at a community college. Particularly, he discusses an event he calls “my own wake-up call from the world at large” (p. 118). He made a presentation on international student issues at a faculty meeting and included some materials he developed for student orientations. He found out later that an international faculty member called his presentation “racist” because his educational system comparison was largely biased. Shocked, Smythe began to question and seek different answers to how to engage others respectfully in ongoing “conversations about our separate and shared subjective realities” (Smythe, 2009, p. 120). Adopting a different approach, he interviewed his students to get their own perspectives, which helped him to write meaningful curriculum through their perspectives to deal with complex issues such as cultural perceptions and political views. He states that to operate within our “complex global reality” (p. 117) is to understand that all cultures involve ideas of the self,

one's identity, and the other. To consider all these factors in the interaction between the self and the other can be unsettling, as one must let go of all preconceived notions in order to incorporate others' lenses, and the teacher must speak a language of conversation.

Smythe underscores Huebner's (1999) notion of being a teacher is to "reshape our values as we are being re-shaped" (Huebner as cited in Smythe, 2009, p. 117). This type of internal work is difficult and painful because among other emotions, the teacher can feel threatened by "socially constructed differences" (Smythe, 2009, p. 129) and attempt to only see what he or she feels is safe, that being sameness. Teachers must reposition ourselves in order to recognize the marginalized other. Smythe's newly developed ability to have conversations of "talking and listening" (p. 122) makes him more reflective, reflexive, and empathetic to the viewpoints of others, causing what he calls a "new relationship in the teaching/learning dynamic and way of being in the world" (p. 122). As a result one does not see the one's own culture as the baseline measure but see others "who are different as normal" (p. 121). Smythe (2009) argues that educators must make this shift to understand that they are not the fount of all knowledge, rather, teachers may not know and must be willing to ask students their opinions and their perspective, and to question their own "epistemological authority" (p. 122) and motives.

Although these teachers' stories are mostly not about Holocaust education, they demonstrate how teachers' life experiences and their pedagogical engagement with difficult subjects are connected. My study will contribute Holocaust educators' stories to the literature.

### Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the historical development that created Holocaust education out of the Shoah, the pedagogical recommendations for teaching about Holocaust-related issues, and the importance of the teacher's experience playing an important role in this



curriculum space. Huebner (1999) reminds that knowledge is not just produced elsewhere; it comes into being from someone, the “origins of knowledge” (p. 365). This chapter attempts to underscore the teachers’ necessary involvement in historically situated curriculum and the possible personal epiphany that results in nonviolent discovery and educational commitment.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the narrations of four to eight experienced Holocaust educators at the secondary level in order to understand how the participants' life experiences and previous teaching experiences contributed to their commitment, as well as pedagogical approaches to Holocaust education. Listening to "their own voices" (Ayres & Schubert, 1994) of teaching about difficult subjects is important for generating educational insights into the issue. The main research question is:

How do experienced secondary teachers' narratives reveal the influence of their life experiences on their commitments and approaches in Holocaust education?

- Sub-Question 1: How do the participants' life experiences explain their commitment to Holocaust education?
- Sub-Question 2: How do the participants' lives and previous teaching experiences shift their pedagogical approaches in the classroom?
- Sub-Question 3: What does it mean to be a Holocaust educator?

## Research Design

Hermeneutics reminds us of the interpretative nature of all qualitative work through the “whole-part interrelations of a holistic perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 498). Hermeneutics allowed me to engage in the interpretation of the teacher’s text (e.g., interview, writing prompts, and artifacts) to reach deeper understandings. I will briefly discuss Gadamerian hermeneutics as significant to the research design. Afterward, I will discuss narrative inquiry and the design for my research.

### Gadamerian Hermeneutics

Smith (1991) states hermeneutics is much like a conversation in which discovery is not pre-scripted, but emerges as it unfolds. There is an understanding of shared truth between players. Hermeneutic imagination is the notion in which all traditions and knowledge can open up into a “broader world” (p. 195). Hermeneutics within interpretive inquiry is the philosophy of searching for deep meanings within words and communications (Moules, 2002; Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). As a hermeneutical philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer (1989) posits that knowledge is affected by “historically effected consciousness” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 350). Humans neither understand simply by the awareness that something existed in history, nor is their understanding simply the reflection within oneself to determine meaning. Gadamer (1989) thinks meaning results through “fusion of horizons” (p. 350) between two “poles.” The first is that of history, which in itself is an interpretation and the second is the interpreter. We gain an understanding of the past that includes our own comprehension of it and we come to see that the historical existence of something has an effect on us that is greater than we ourselves.

Through this philosophy, Gadamer (1989) demonstrates that humans are connected to our past, traditions, and our ancestors in ways that lie beyond pure reason (positivist) because pure reason “leaves no room for the experience of the other and the alterity of history” (p. 355). Our

understanding “ultimately finds its fulfillment only in an infinite consciousness” (p. 350) and occurs in a larger historical and hermeneutic context. Dostal (2002) argues that meaning is made from understanding in a context (i.e., a situation, an occurrence) and sense is made through careful observation and dialogical extraction of language in conversation (p. 3). Crotty (1998), in writing about Gadamerian hermeneutics further expounds that the conversation between people opens to discovery, which creates meaning.

According to Smith (1991), there are several requirements of hermeneutic imagination as it relates to a Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry and the ethical attitude of the researcher. For the first requirement, the researcher must consider the language (spoken and written) and historical influence upon that language. The researcher may use etymology to determine the historical evolution of language (i.e., word choice and diction) and understand metaphor, analogy, sentence structure, because “in a deep sense our language contains the story of who we are as people” (Michaels & Ricks as quoted in Smith, 1991, p.199). The researcher can ask the participant to define key words as surfaced to understand *their* meaning of *their* vocabulary. The second requirement is that the researcher must be willing to be a part of the interpretive cycle, not distancing self from the process. This involves the ability and willingness to question one’s own thinking and the thinking of the participant as represented. The joining of the researcher and participant’s knowing become new understandings (Dowling, 2004, p. 37). The researcher must meaningfully propose alternatives as possibilities that are different from other grand narratives. There are possible “suffocated narratives” that can be surfaced through careful treatment of participant language (Smith, 1991, p. 199).

The third aspect is that the researcher must commit to the meaning that the participant makes and be careful not to impose meaning upon the other (Smith, 1991, p. 201). It would be

wise if the researcher built a relationship with the participant before data is collected. Such relationship opens “conversation windows,” which are incidental conversations that may have additional meaning (i.e., conversation prior to activating the recorder) (Smith, 1991, p. 200). The researcher must also be thinking about the web-like relations of data to understand the “storied nature of the human world” (p. 201). Fourthly, hermeneutics is about the making of meaning and not simply reporting it (p. 201). Therefore, the researcher must be open to new and emerging knowledge as discovered in narratives through hermeneutic understandings.

Using Gadamerian hermeneutics as the framework, I think narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology. Narrative inquiry examines participant experiences in their social and historical context (Chase, 2010), open to hermeneutic understanding.

### **Narrative Inquiry as Methodology**

Connelly and Clandinin (1991) argue that narrative inquiry is qualitative research because it focuses on experience and the qualities of life and education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991; Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). They state that in educational research narrative has become “a way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). People live stories and in telling and retelling them, they reaffirm the stories, change them and create new ones. These stories educate the self and others about how educators teach, learn, and change and how institutions influence our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). This methodology is often used in qualitative-oriented research in curriculum studies, psychology, and critical theory and among others. In my study, narrative inquiry is the methodology of the research and influences methods and ethical considerations I discuss later. It is also a matching methodology for reaching hermeneutical understanding.

Deeply rooted in the writings of John Dewey's notion of experience, narrative inquiry is the methodology that brings an understanding of a person's experience within educational life. His notion of continuity means that experiences grow out of other experiences; "there is always a history, and it is always changing and going somewhere" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2), learning to "...move back and forth between the personal and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and the future" (p. 3).

Narrative inquiry requires the researcher to listen first and give participants the time and space to tell their stories, "a collaboration over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) in such a way that when the researched tell their stories "both voices are heard" (p. 127). This means that both participants and the researcher are significant to the telling and retelling of the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). There are plots and scenes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 128) exposed by the participant that is related to a larger context of which the researcher needs to be aware.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss tensions within narrative inquiry and point out that the researcher must consider temporality, people, action, certainty, and context of the participant's story. Temporality means that the researched participant and their stories are located in time and are recognized as having a past, a present, and a possible future. The concept of people means that the people involved may be going through personal change and the researcher must be open to them as making in the process rather than fixed. Action is a narrative sign that must be interpreted before meaning can be attached to it. The fourth tension with certainty means that the interpretation of events may have different ways of interpreting them. Context is the fifth indicator of tension that asks the researcher to take into account the context of

the experience that influences understanding. In my study, I attended to these tensions to tell the participants' stories.

### **Selection of Participants**

Sampling for this study was purposeful. To recruit participants, I sought the help from a Jewish Federation based in a Midwest, U.S. city. Using the organization's area educators' database, the federation education director emailed area teachers en masse my initial recruitment letter (Appendix B, Appendix A are the questions in the Google form that accompanies Appendix B) who work in local school districts and who have shown an interest or attended training at the Jewish Federation. My questions in the survey were designed to determine whether the teacher is experienced with Holocaust education. At this point, I relied on the teachers to respond to me through email. When this happened I gave the teacher Appendix C either by a follow-up email or in person to inform the teacher of the study and to answer his or her questions about the study.

Following this, I chose seven teachers. The data collection setting of each participant was a private reserved study room at my university, and I provided more about the location to each participant after they were selected. The selected teachers were experienced Holocaust educators – as they were integral to the main research question. I learned the most from these teachers and gained an in-depth way of knowing. The number of research participants is small due to the amount of interview and observation time to be invested to understand these “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 234).

My goal was to choose participants who represent age, gender, and race diversity if possible, but due to my sample size, I included all many teachers who responded and matched

the research criteria. I answered each teacher's questions, and I asked each participant to sign the informed consent form (Appendix D) and they did.

## **Data Collection**

Patton (2002) argues that multiple sources can be used as data. In my study, I used at least three interviews with each participant in addition to a discussion of any artifact they chose to share during interview two or three. I engaged in one follow-up interview with one participant. I also used writing prompts to triangulate data sources. The interview questions (Appendix E) were designed to address the main research question and sub-questions. I established relationships with participants in the first interview and then focused on the main and the first sub-question; the second sub-question is the focus of interview two and the third sub-question is the focus of interview three, although everything was also intertwined in three interviews because I did not limit participants' answers. If needed, I offered to schedule a follow-up interview and I asked clarifying questions via email. One participant did not have the teacher artifact at the time of the interview, and so a follow-up interview was held for this participant.

Each interview was between 60- and 90-minutes long, and I used a semi-structured interview format. I asked for teachers' stories using initial questions and then followed teachers' responses with further questions as they emerged. I recorded and transcribed all questions and responses including both the planned and the emergent. I used a digital recorder to record each participant's storied-answers to interview questions, and also recoded parts of responses by hand in a paperback field journal. Artifacts were part of the data collection and could be the teacher's own reflective writing, such as, but not limited to, diary entries, artwork, a token from their travels, or a piece of students work. The teacher was asked to explain the significance of the shared artifact(s) and this explanation was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The participants



responded to two writing prompts (Appendix F), one before the start of the interviews and one between interviews two and three. The researcher is trying to “give an account of the multiple levels” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991) of the inquiry. The researcher is intricately a part of the research, and therefore, I had an ethical responsibility of understanding “how far to probe” (p. 128). In addition, I kept a researcher journal during all interactions with participants. Although this was not transcribed, I used this journal along with transcripts to confirm what participants said in the moment of the interviews. I also recorded my thoughts while participants were talking, and because my thoughts were recorded, I could refer back to them. Having this extra layer of information was helpful in data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Craig (2014) states the “teacher’s personal practice is unavoidably influenced by the places where they occur and attention must be given to who teachers are” (p. 83). She also cautions the researcher to be aware of the difference between the context and the person within that context. Connelly and Clandinin (1991) point out that narrative inquiry involves three commonplaces in the analysis: temporality, sociality, and place. The narrative work unfolds on a past-present-future continuum, focusing on human interaction. Narrative writers move back and forth in time referencing different occurrences that happened at different times and in various places with different people or things (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991). I retell participants’ stories along the line of time, place, and relationality in chapters four and five. The knowledge was co-constructed and reconstructed in my interpretive act. Because the stories belong to the participants, and when shared, I came to experience and present those stories.

For thematic analysis, I read through the entire transcripts of all three data points for a general overview of the entire data. Then as I read again, I made notes of possible themes

throughout all texts. As I reread the transcripts again, I determined patterns, themes, and ideas in the data. This did not define the extent of the research, but it was a place to start the analysis. Then I reread the data to code the data in a “comprehensive coding scheme” (Patton, 2002, p. 464).

Each time the transcriptions were read, I checked the coding and included additional categories as they emerged. Patton (2002) suggests writing down key phrases and terms from the text to gain the emic (insider) perspective. Patton (2002) suggests convergence in the data to observe things that fit together by observing internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity:

- Internal homogeneity concerns the extent that certain data dovetail to establish “new ways of thinking about the teachers’ text” (p. 465); and
- External heterogeneity concerns the extent to which the different categories are “bold and clear” (p. 465).

The analysis of the data broadens, burrows into the text of the story and “reconstitutes” the narrative because fieldwork is interpretive (Miller, 2004, p. 55) and there were tensions to which I paid attention and not “smooth over.” I was aware of the “spaces between where intersecting stories bump” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr, 2009, p. 84) and carefully observed “patterns, themes, categories, and typologies” (Clandinin, 2000, p. 463) to bring stories and analysis of narratives together.

## **Transcriptions**

I used a self-made chart to handwrite information and notes that came from the first readings of all the texts. I employed the help of a transcriptionist to speed up the process of getting all conversations on paper for the process of analysis, and I listened to all tapes when reviewing the transcriptions to capture a holistic picture of participants’ stories including their

emotional expressions. I also wrote notes in the margins of all transcripts. In addition, I made a hard copy of all transcripts, which were secured in my home office, and the data files are electronically stored on my personal computer.

### **Rigor of the Study**

I discuss the rigor of this study in this section to address the issues of “credibility, transferability, and verisimilitude” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 134). Credibility is a criteria for believability in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Credibility of this study is seen through prolonged engagement with research participants, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checking, and the use of open-ended questions. I was in prolonged engagement with participants to “establish trust necessary to build rapport and uncover constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). Persistent observation assisted me in recognizing and identifying characters and elements most relevant to the research question. I used a peer, a fellow graduate student, to discuss my findings and discuss questions about the research. In addition, I used member checks, so the participants can check their data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The audio recording and transcription of the interviews and using the same semi-structured interview questions attest to credibility of my study. These different methods of collecting field data when used together provided benefit that can overcome individual limitations of any one single method (Shenton, 2004). I ensured the accuracy of the data through member checks. Participants were emailed their text and they returned modified paper copies to me and I amended the written text to modify any inconsistencies within each narrative.

Patton (2002) refers to transferability as “fittingness” (p. 584). Transferability is about a case-to-case transfer, corresponding to external validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Loh, 2013). I used thick description to best describe the teacher, without the use of names or other identifiers,

and his or her context and responses to allow another researcher to determine the transferability between studies.

Verisimilitude in narrative inquiry means being truthful to reality and draws the audience into the stories. Does the narration seem reasonable and likely to be real? (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Loh, 2013). In my study, I used rich text to describe the context of each narrative and “narratives are well crafted and will aid in understanding the subjective world of the participants” (Eisner as quoted in Loh, 2013, p. 10), permitting “insights, and will deepen empathy and sympathy” (p. 10). My writing narrative must seem believable, or “ring true” (Loh, 2013, p. 9). The reader should see “congruence with their own experiences or similar, parallel, or analogous situations” (Blumenfeld-Jones as cited in Loh, 2013, p. 10).

### **Possible Risks of Narrative Inquiry**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind the researcher to listen carefully because every bit of narrative may contain the ‘seed of an important point’ (p. 181). In addition, narrative inquiry is intersubjective because the narration is collected through relating to the participant by questioning and understanding. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) recommend that the researcher should be “wakeful” (p. 184) to the contextual work involved in narrative inquiry and to avoid fiction writing. In addition, the “Hollywood plot” is a danger. This type of analysis results in so much “narrative smoothing” (p. 181) that the result is a fairytale, (everything works out in the end) a fictionalized account of events that may not demonstrate the complexity of participants’ lives. The researcher must be “judicial” so as not to engage in narrative smoothing to make up sound-good stories. In my study, I maintained “wakefulness” and engaged ongoing reflections to achieve “verisimilitude” (believability, plausibility) (p. 184).

## Summary

This chapter addressed my plan for a research-based qualitative study utilizing Gadamerian hermeneutics and narrative inquiry as methodology. The hermeneutic perspective encompasses the research attitude and ethical considerations for conversations that took place within research. In addition, in this study, hermeneutics and narrative inquiry dovetailed as research perspective, and the limitations of this study were discussed. Also outlined in this chapter were the steps to be taken in obtaining purposeful research participants and the use of the appendices was addressed.

## CHAPTER IV

### RETELLING STORIES PART I

The process for the first layer of analysis involves retelling the teachers' stories through sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Connell, 2000, p. 49). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that narration moves back and forth in time, and temporality is imperative to fluid retelling of one's story. In other words, the participants' narrations flow back and forth through time much like the weft threads on a loom. The participants tell their experiences in response to interview questions, and as they do so they created a connection between the temporality (time) and sociality (social space and relationships) within their individual stories. Each participant was recruited as stated in chapter three, and each agreed to three interview sessions, two writing prompts, and an explanation of one artifact of the participants' choice. In all cases, I began the retelling with the participant's earliest point of narration to reveal the youngest memory as told to me, and I attempted a chronological retelling in the context of place as well as their important relationships with others. For example, I asked participants to tell me about their life before teaching. Most started with a story about their younger self, and this usually included family; so the place of most stories begins at home (place), with family (sociality) and with their younger selves (temporality) ranging from the 1960s to the 1980s. Some participants told great detail,

while others refer generally to parents and siblings. These are the basic warp threads upon which each story begins, albeit the weft threads vary, and more on this is addressed in chapter six. The reader should consider reading chapters four and five together because both tell all participant stories and dividing the seven stories was necessary to avoid one extremely long chapter. The first three participants speak directly about the connections they make to teaching and learning about the Holocaust and the effect this has on their students and themselves. They discuss their story with clearer articulation concerning the shift in their teaching. The other four participants do not directly speak about the influence of their own learning on students and their learning. The division of the chapters is in no way an attempt on my part to diminish any participant's story; rather, it is a way through which I communicate my understanding of each person's story. In addition, each participant story begins with a specific quote used as they explain their story. I offer these as threads that tie Holocaust content to individuals' narrative.

#### Bea's Story: "Everything is About How We Treat Others"

*They marched through the ghetto to the Umschlagplatz, where they joined thousands of people waiting in the broiling August sun. There was no shade, shelter, water, or sanitary facilities. There were none of the cries and screams usually heard when people were forced to board the trains. The orphans walked quietly in their rows of four. One eyewitness says, "This was no march to the train cars, but rather a mute protest against the murderous regime...a process the like of which no human eye had ever witnessed."*

*Korczak was offered a way out of the ghetto for himself, but not for the children. The teacher would not abandon his students. He was with his children to the end. All were gassed at Treblinka (Berenbaum, 2006, p. 78).*

## Childhood Memory and Family Background

Bea is in her early 60s and is a middle school English teacher in a Midwest suburban district. She has taught for nearly 40 years, and with a broad white smile, proudly declares that she has been teaching some form of Holocaust education for 30 years. The family in which she grew up included her mother, father, a sister who is eight years her senior, and a brother who is 18-months older. The family was in a lower socio-economic situation in a small, rural area in the same state she presently lives. Her childhood was a relatively quiet existence, during which time she attended a small elementary school and went to a local church on Sundays. Growing up in the 1950s in a small town, she experienced freedom to move around. For instance, even as a small child she was allowed to stay outdoors until well past dark on most nights. She says both her parents were giving people, instilling in her the same sense of selflessness, often leading by example. She recalls childhood memories of her parents sending money via Western Union several times to needy relatives, despite her family not having enough for their own budget. As an adult, she realized when her mother served chicken wings for dinner, it was done out of necessity and not because chicken wings enjoyed the same popularity as they currently do in U.S. culture. When funds were low and because both parents were unafraid of hard work, her mother would bake goods to sell and her father would take on additional hours over and above the extra-long hours he already worked. Bea describes her father's work boots as freckled with so much sweat that salt crystals formed on the top of them making them appear white, something she noticed every day when he returned home from a day's labor. Through this upbringing, she says she understands she is not "better than others, and yet she was as good as anyone" (Writing Prompt, Bea). This sense of self she attributes to her parents. And yet, her story is not without painful interludes.



Bea's mother was the oldest of seven children, was an avid reader and an excellent student. However, opportunities were limited to her and she married at age 19 and quickly had three children. Described as stubborn, smart, and independent, much of her adult life was spent cooking, housekeeping, and making sure the children did their homework. Bea reveals that her mother felt incomplete as a person and that as an adult, she was not called by her first name, but was referred to as *Granny* or *mom*, titles that only touched the surface of her identity. This is an example of how Bea's mother bitterly regretted her lack of personal development.

Bea's father was orphaned at age 12 after his mother died and Bea's grandfather abandoned her father and his several siblings. When authorities realized that the children, who were all under age, were raising themselves, they were separated and sent to several relatives. Bea's father was sent to live with an abusive uncle. No more is revealed about life with this uncle, however, Bea shakes her head sadly as she tells this part of the story. She says that her father never learned to love because he was never loved. He was forced to leave school when he was a seventh-grade student. To escape his living conditions, he lied about his age to serve in the U.S. Army, traveling to the islands of Okinawa and Manila in the Philippines. Described as insecure, unloved, and jealous, he was a man who avoided public places and never told his children he loved them nor fully trusted his wife. Rather he worked very hard, never letting the family go hungry. Not being fully sure of her father's love because he did not tell her, Bea reassured herself that she intuitively knew he loved her. When she went to college, her father tripled his work efforts so she would not have any school debt, an act that she interpreted as his love. Yet, he exhibited troubling behavior.

## Abused and Not Believed

While still living with her parents, Bea remember times in which her father would leave home a couple of times each year and go on a drinking binge of unknown length. These events would send Bea's mother into stressful crying fits. When the father did return, the parents fought, shouting violently, followed by a peaceful time until the next drinking bender occurred. During these years, Bea was in her early teen years. She recalls her teachers comparing her to her older, brilliant brother and sister. When her brother helped her with homework he would make comments about her apparent diminished ability and this lessened her confidence, making her doubt herself, resulting in her feeling she always had to earn acceptance. She states she still feels like she must earn approval of others. She was a loner and was not a member in any cliques at school. This is significant because it underscores the insecurity she feels she inherited from her parents and deepens her feeling of rejection. It was around this time in her life, her father began abusing her.

Bea said, "I suffered sexual abuse for a full year until I finally had the courage to tell my mother. She refused to believe me, as did my older sister. We all lived the remainder of our lives ignoring the issue as if it never happened" (Writing Prompt, Bea). During this time, her father exhibited strange, over-controlling behavior exemplified as overcorrection of her actions and restricting her movements. For example, he tried to control when she could leave the house. Bea describes this as the "typical route that abusers take" of becoming "really firm and strict and you're not going to do this and you're not going to do that, which is pretty textbook" behavior (Interview with Bea). During a heated moment between Bea and her mother she began to openly rebel against parental authority. If her mother did not want her to attend a specific event, Bea would yell out that nothing could be any worse than what her father was doing to her. Angrily,

her mother confronted her father, who immediately denied any wrongdoing. No further discussion happened. So, a cloud of doubt always surrounded her father's actions, and Bea felt abandoned when the female family members did not acknowledge the abuse. Her brother did not know about the abuse, so most of the family continued to pretend this did not happen and never spoke about it. Bea questions how her mother could not know because she should have seen the father go to and from her room at unusual times, especially since there was only one way into and out of Bea's room. She said that after her confrontation in which she yelled out that nothing worse could happen to her, her father continued his nocturnal treks to her back bedroom. When she saw him coming, she would yell out at her mother, who was in another part of the house, and the father would turn away from her room. This action stopped the abuse from continuing. Learning to hide her feelings and existing for survival became a way of life. "My life was changed forever, but I did not feel the heartbreak until I was older," Bea emoted (Interview with Bea). At present, she recognizes that despite prayer and forgiveness, she still wrestles with feelings of guilt and self-acceptance because somehow doubt remains about her responsibility concerning the abuse, that somehow it was her fault. "I think I was in survival mode for many years," she explained.

### **Early Adulthood and Moving Back to Be Near Parents**

Bea moved away to college and met her husband and married. Because of work, they relocated for a couple of years, and had two sons. Then the young family moved back to where her parents lived. By now it had been decades after the abuse. "I saw my parents sometimes several times a week, but we pretended certain things never happened," Bea stated (Interview with Bea). Within a year of moving back, her 63-year-old father was diagnosed with brain and lung cancer. Never learning to drive, her mother needed help with transportation to and from

treatments. By this time her brother lived in another city, her sister was less dependable, and so her parents constantly relied on Bea for help. Bea willingly took her young sons with her to help her parents with transportation to chemotherapy sessions. For about four years, Bea helped her mother with care giving. When he got really ill and her mother could not leave her father, Bea brought groceries to the house. When no other medical treatment worked, Bea's father's physical condition worsened. The nurse, who watched him struggle against death, told Bea that her father was waiting to hear something from someone.

### **A Decision to Forgive**

Taking several tissues from the pack on the interview table, Bea begins to cry. She wipes her eyes and states how difficult this part of her story is to tell, however, she gathers her emotions, her voice still shaking, she shares:

The nurse kept saying there's no reason for him to be alive. He's waiting for something. He's waiting for somebody to tell him something. I knew what it was, but no one else did. Well, my mom and my sister might have, but they didn't believe me, so the nurse asked us all to go in and talk to him individually, and I volunteered to go first. I thought, 'OK,' and then everyone else can go. So, I leaned over and told him what a great dad he was and that I forgive him. He took this huge sigh and died right then (Interview with Bea).

Bea thinks her father realized his death was close, and he needed to hear her forgive him, although he would never have asked for it. Her sister and mother, however, may have faulted Bea somehow because they could not see their father and husband, respectively, for one final time before he died.

As she tells this story, her voice is strong and sure. She is no longer crying, and says, “I had already forgiven him, he just didn’t know it” (Interview with Bea). Bea explains that “I wanted my husband to like my dad and I wanted my kids to love their grandfather” (Interview with Bea).

Before Bea’s father was diagnosed with cancer, she recalled one of the trees in the yard of her present home was downed in a storm, and her father wanted to plant another one for his daughter. Together, they shopped for and planted a different tree to replace the one that was lost. She says she can never move because that tree is precious to her. She teeters within the pathos of the abuse and of her feelings of care for both her parents. For example, she states that her care of father and mother somehow made her “the favorite of her siblings” (Interview with Bea). She states she “couldn’t justify what he’d done, but she accepted her father as a person who must have experienced trauma.” From what she understands of his young life, she knows that “he couldn’t express love. And I could explain it all away which doesn’t justify anything, but it just took me years” (Interview with Bea). She states she realizes “not that those situations haven’t affected every single day of my life, they do. But I could move on and like I said, I never felt like I wanted to play a victim for very long” (Interview with Bea). She did not like to remain in a negative state. In addition, she did not want to feel like she could not make some of her own decisions.

As a teacher, Bea says that she has a deep sense of which students are struggling. She believes students who tell her they have or are being abused must be believed. She is emphatic when she says that students, especially girls, don’t lie about such things and Bea advocates for her students. I will turn next to her stories of teaching the Holocaust.

## Bea's Teaching Stories: Connecting Through Relationships

In this section, I retell Bea's story as she recounts the influence of her life, the development of Holocaust content, and the unfolding of her understanding of the deep commitment she has formed with students and the Holocaust content. She talks about her roles of being a mother and of being a teacher and sometimes she combines ideas from both.

Bea became a mother in her early 20s. She says that as a result of her being unfairly compared to her brother, she does not compare her own sons to each other. Likewise, she does not compare students with their siblings, which she has had in earlier classes, and chooses to not mention that she has taught a child's sibling. She is careful to know students' names and does not use comparative statements when teaching them. She begins her year by building a specific kind of relationship with her students because she remembers the negative feeling of being dismissed or recognized only as someone's relation. "I really see my students," is how she explains this process.

Much like one of her sons who she says is selfish and only contacts her when he needs something, she accepts that he is different from her other child and shares an appreciation and affinity for both. The other child is compassionate and chooses a relationship with her that is based beyond material things. He is also less financially stable and has a complicated family life. She attempts to understand each of her children as different, and relate to each separately, while facilitating a healthy adult relationship. She is careful not to impose her will over them and observes a healthy boundary. She will ask each of her children when engaged in conversation, "Do you want me to listen or to give you feedback?" (Interview with Bea). Then she carefully listens if that is what they want.

## A Shift in Teaching Through Pedagogy

Over the years, she has become more sensitive to students and recognizes that some students struggle with a variety of issues more so now than ever before because of a wider variety of difficulties in culture and with life in general. She says, “It sounds crazy but I seem to have a sixth-sense with girls who have been sexually abused. I don’t know why. I can’t explain it, but I can go to the counselor and say, ‘I’m really concerned about so-and-so or so-and-so’ and nine times out of 10 it’s [abuse] happening” (Interview with Bea). The types of student struggle has changed. For example, she states, “kids this year especially, are struggling with gender identity and a few of mine struggle with [being] sexually abused at a young age...” (Interview with Bea). She acknowledges that she does not fully understand some of the new situations with which students struggle and she will research and respond with some understanding because students’ knowledge has also shifted to be more informed. One of her students told her in a paper that he was pansexual. “You’re not just XX or XY (chromosome). You can be XXY or XYY and you can have more of one than the other but be in the opposite body” (Interview with Bea). She told me that she was ignorant of what this student was trying to tell her and had to research these scientific findings in order to make informed statements in response to her student. In addition to dealing with students’ personal dilemma, she has grown in her ability to respond to students’ academic questions, especially as it pertains to the subject of the Holocaust. But, this differs from her early years of teaching.

Her first attempt at anything Holocaust-related happened as she taught the play based on *Anne Frank, Diary of A Young Girl* (Frank, 1977) to her eighth-graders in her English Language Arts classroom. During the lessons, students asked her questions that she could neither answer factually nor with her own opinion. She was uncomfortable not knowing and wanted to learn

more so she could answer their questions, so she sought out training opportunities. She describes her teaching as “a hot mess” meaning she lacked classroom management and instructional effectiveness (general knowledge and content knowledge). As a result to know more, she applied for the Belfer Conference in Washington, D.C., and was accepted. The Belfer conference, sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), is designed for educators who have taught the Holocaust for five years or less and have never been trained at the museum. At this conference, she received teaching resources and she “used all of it in her teaching” (Interview with Bea). Gradually through commitment to teach and perseverance to learn, Bea’s teaching began to change.

### **Commitment to Students and Curriculum**

Around her eighth or ninth year of teaching, she began to feel more efficient in her teaching and her learning of the history surrounding the time period and historical context of the Holocaust. Then she began to realize that she told many personal stories of the Holocaust to students, a method that was taught to her at the Belfer conference she had attended years ago. Her commitment to teaching this subject increases every year; she calls herself “obsessed” (Interview with Bea). She feels connected to the topic more than ever because she states her students are interested, constantly wanting to know more, and she sees students become more empathetic. In spite of personal difficulty, such as in the year her mother died, she is drawn back to the subject because all students need to know about the Shoah and they come expecting to be taught. She recalls the feeling of being dismissed by her family, which resulted in a superficial closeness she describes as “close, but not close...I never said I have an issue and I would like to talk with you about. We never dug deep, because we couldn’t because of that (sexual abuse)” (Interview with Bea). She has accepted the lack of her family’s acceptance, the confusing and



hurtful actions by her father, and her mother's neglect. She is evolving into a caring educator who does not react negatively to student behavior and believes in them. She says, "she really sees her students" (Interview with Bea). While she cannot fully understand or articulate how invisible she seemed to the family of her childhood, she knows her recall of events is not fantasy. Therefore, she commits deeply to teaching and understanding as much of her students as people. Bea's ability to accept both her love for her parents and the isolations she felt from them creates an understanding through which she empathizes with her students. The following are examples given by Bea to demonstrate her teaching.

One year, Bea relates, a student kept his head down on his desk for the first three days of school. She says she prayed about this student's behavior and chose not to reprimand him even though she was mystified. She asked him to write her a letter and he could tell her whatever he wanted. Through reading his text she discovered the student had a brain tumor and was awaiting surgery the following week. She demonstrates awareness as she wonders now what would have happened with relationship building if she had reactively responded out of offense, rather than check the facts of the student's predicament. She exhibits openness to students and sees them as people maneuvering through experiences. For example, one of her students this year chose to tell her that she was bisexual. Evidently, she says, the student was not afraid of being judged by her and needed someone to talk to. She filled that role. Another student revealed that his stepfather died. Along with content mastery, her ability to teach students and understand their needs has improved.

Another child with severe Asperger's Syndrome revealed her difficulty with Holocaust studies. This surprised Bea because children with Asperger's are assumed not to show emotion, however this child said of her class, "Well, you'll spend about 12 weeks learning every detail

about the Holocaust in such minute detail that you will have nightmares for the rest of your life” (Interview with Bea). Distressed by this student’s response, she worked with the student’s parent and offered alternative assignments not focused on the Holocaust for the rest of the Holocaust unit. Bea describes what she calls her ignorance by saying “she strayed” (Interview with Bea) by not recognizing that this student’s politeness did not reflect her inner turmoil. Her awareness helps her to see that what students feel and understand is not often understood through outward demonstrations or their work product. According to Bea, it was her responsibility to seek out what the child was experiencing, and then to work with the parent and the school to get the student to study an alternate curriculum. Because she accepts that her students are key knowers in the human experience, her pedagogical choices have changed to reveal a patience, kindness, and acceptance of students as themselves. Children and familial connections are a constant consideration for Bea and an extension of her teaching.

### **Engendering a Holocaust Educator**

As a teacher of Holocaust education, she says she is “obsessed with it” because “it is a story that must be told” (Interview with Bea). When she realized at the Belfer conference that the story of the Holocaust is really the story of individuals and their suffering, she began teaching without overgeneralizing the Holocaust. After what she calls her first few years of teaching, she discovered the importance of relating Holocaust education as a lesson in “how we treat people; it’s all about that” (Interview with Bea). Students “hang on every word, because they may not be getting this kind of guidance at home” (Interview with Bea). Bea realized she wasn’t just teaching subject matter, she was teaching people “about life” (Interview with Bea). Developing relationships with students early on creates an atmosphere in which they want to know “what she thinks about things concerning all life” (Interview with Bea). For example, she sees the

importance in her teaching reflected in students' ability to empathize. When posed with questions about the inability to have control over one's life and being "targeted for something you have no control over, at least 60 percent of [her] students can relate" (Interview with Bea). She expounds on this point by stating that "everyone can relate. We have all been targeted for one thing or another, but we also do that to people. I am trying to teach them: You're the people who can stop this [prejudice and violent racism]" (Interview with Bea). This is her focus of Holocaust education: to not focus on the gore, but to teach about how these incidents relate to what it is to be human, in relationship to others.

Understanding that history is made up of personal stories has "had an impact on the kids" (Interview with Bea). Likewise, Bea's own personal history creates the type of teacher she has become, and influencing her students as learners and as humans. There came a point, well before her father died, that she stopped wanting her mother and sister to believe her and not view her as a liar. Bea feels more confident about working through her feelings of guilt and recognizes her survival was in part because she has learned to be grateful for what appears to be small things. Bea's recognizes her ability to navigate a complicated space with her parents and maintain connections and this also facilitates her understanding of her students at a deeper level because they also struggle with areas that are complex. Because of her own understanding and experiences of difficulty, her pedagogical choices have changed to reveal a patience (willing to wait and not react negatively), kindness, and understanding of students as humans. She says, "students echo their parent's politics and she sees her job is to help students think on their own" (Interview with Bea). She continues to grow as an educator by cultivating the understanding of the connection and interconnections between herself, complex curriculum, and her students. Her acceptance of the imperfections of human interaction and the varied human experience allows

her continued relevant teaching that continues to help students engage with history and their part in it.

### Curriculum Weaving

Students are eased into the yearlong curriculum by first reading nonfiction and doing their own research “about people, not numbers” (Interview with Bea). In other words, the research is not assigned to students so they discover only general facts and figures, but it is about specific people Bea assigns to each student. Connections are made from the students’ knowledge to the broader historical content through victim stories and pictures of places and people. Then she utilizes analogies and additional significant historical stories of Holocaust figures (i.e., Janusz Korczak, Oscar Schindler, Chiune Sugihara, etc.).

One story she tells students on a perennial basis is that of Janusz Korczak, the pen name of educator and author Henryck Goldszmit. He was the “Mr. Rogers of Polish radio and ran an orphanage” (Berenbaum, 2006, p. 76). He was also a Jewish physician and was instrumental in Polish society, in addition to writing children’s books under his pen name. Korczak told stories centered around one of his main characters, a heroic boy-king, King Matt. This king helped his people and created a better world for people. He developed a newspaper written by the children and included in the regular Polish newspaper. Most important to Korczak was his orphanage, located near Warsaw, Poland. As the Warsaw ghetto was being formed in 1940, the orphanage was relocated into its borders. Later, in the summer of 1942 there were 265,000 Jews who were rounded up from this ghetto and sent to Treblinka death camp. Although Korczak had friends who would facilitate his escape of the ghetto, “he would not leave his children” and was led away with them to certain death. It is said that he marched with his children while pretending to be part of King Matt’s followers (Berenbaum, 2006, p. 77). Bea asks her students, “Who dies for

other people's children?" Her students' reply and she echoes, "Teachers do" (Interview with Bea). Careful to underscore the importance of using spiritual resistance, Bea teaches that not all resistance uses mechanical weaponry. In other words, survivors and victims alike engaged in ways to keep their internal life alive, refusing to commit suicide, or giving up their humanity. Her students are encouraged to identify with this type of thinking.

Bea gradually and systematically weaves Holocaust education with her English curriculum, teaching content such as genre by introducing different readings that can be anchored in some kind of social justice theme. For example, the class will read some of Maya Angelou's (1993) autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Then, gradually as the year progresses she introduces universal themes (i.e., survival, suffering, etc.) to anchor class discussions, articles, literature readings, and writing about their learning.

The teacher develops a multi-layered approach to teaching students to think about others. "Everything is about how we treat others," she reminds me (Interview with Bea). Finally, near the end of the year, Bea assigns students to create a final presentation about the person they initially researched. "Because I do not dictate the topic of the project (the style or method of presentation), I think the students create beautiful, meaningful, and inspiring art projects based on their research and their emotional and intellectual responses. She says her students are "intuitive and they get more than you think they do," Bea states (Interview with Bea). It is clear that she leaves room within the curriculum for students' decision making about the curriculum choices and she allows them to deeply connect in ways she may not have planned. Because they are connecting with Holocaust curriculum and with how "we treat others" (Interview with Bea), students can learn about and compare and contrast complex situations, even those of more modern history.

Bea's commitment to learning about Holocaust issues as well as her commitment to each of her students and their development is buttressed by her own sense of commitment to her personal scholarship and that of her students. Because of her experiences and acceptance of tensions as mentioned in her life stories, she is committed to her students' humanity. She is able to deeply extend her emotional fortitude to her students when dealing with the personal stories of Holocaust survivors and victims that make up a large core of the curriculum.

Bea constantly challenges herself to learn more, to cultivate, and to "excavate the area [of Holocaust study] and not to just take a tour of it" (Interview with Bea). She is surprised at how much her students begin to learn and that they become disgusted at the lack of U.S. involvement. They begin to understand the complexity of the complicity of the U.S. through specific stories of the *MS St. Louis* and of the *Kindertransport*. I briefly explain both to clarify this statement.

The *MS St. Louis*, a luxury liner carrying 936 passengers left Germany to travel to Cuba on May 13, 1939. The passengers were denied their landing permits by the Cuban government, and thus, the ship sat in the harbor. American Jewish Joint Distribution committee (JDC) could not persuade the U.S. government to take these refugees. Columbia, Chile, Paraguay and Argentina all denied harbor. The *MS St. Louis* returned to Europe where most of the passengers were allowed to disembark and were accepted as immigrants. Although Belgium, the Netherlands, England, and France admitted the passengers, within months, these countries were ruled by Nazi Germany (Berenbaum, 2006, p. 54). Those who were not allowed any entrance were returned to Germany and certainly death.

The *Kindertransport* was an effort to rescue German children. Britain took 10,000 children. The Wagner-Rogers Bill was written so that the U.S. could take 20,000. The bill died in committee and never came to the Senate floor or the U.S. House of Representatives (Berenbaum,

2006, p. 53). By using examples such as these and discussing them in detail with students, Bea gives specific details so students can fortify their understanding of what the complexity of events look like within Holocaust history.

Bea desires to assist her students in the hope they will “grow into adults who celebrate diversity and become aware of injustices and take action against them and who teach these lessons to their own children” (Interview with Bea) is one of her teaching priorities.

Acknowledgement of this compels her to continue teaching. Students also learn about other genocides, similar to those that occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Mass, 1996) and Rwanda. They begin to comprehend a few of the far-reaching negative effects of not respecting one’s fellow man, labeling, dehumanization, and systemized murder. They are exposed, through her teaching, to the positive effects of caring about humanity and surfacing one’s own racial prejudice. It is her goal that they ultimately understand they stand at an important place in history and become witnesses to “how powerful and hurtful [those] words escalate to something else, and how easy it is to find an underdog, someone who is a scapegoat” (Interview with Bea). Students are hungry for this guidance. They want to know how they can “figure out what kind of person to be. This history goes way, way farther than a lecture” (Interview with Bea).

Bea is committed to learn and teach her students because it will influence their formation into adults. She states, “I can’t retire until there is someone to take my place [at this school]” (Interview with Bea). The ideal *someone* will have humility to study and care deeply about the topic of the Holocaust and be passionate about teaching students.

### Aracella's Story: "Real Teachers Also Listen to Their Students"

*The Holocaust is a sacred realm. One cannot enter this realm without realizing that only those who were there can know. But the outsider can come close to the gates.*

*One can never know and yet one must try* (Elie Wiesel, Counterpoint, 1980).

Aracella retired from teaching after a decades-long career and holds three English degrees: two masters and a bachelor of arts. Aracella's initial search for work as a teacher, with undergraduate degree in hand, was unsuccessful due to a glut of people who also had English degrees. As a result, she found employment as a secretary and research assistant. But, about six months later, she received a call from her cooperating teacher, inviting Aracella to fill her soon-to-be vacant teaching position. We began our conversation with Aracella recalling her earlier life.

### Learning is from Mother and Grandmother

In response to my initial questions about her mother, she writes: "My mother was born in another state, and moved with her family to the mid-western state where I was raised" (Answers to writing prompt, Aracella). Aracella's maternal grandfather worked for the railroad and then started his own company developing machinery to pave roads. Her maternal grandmother was an immigrant from Ireland and arrived in U.S. via Ellis Island. At one point in her life, Aracella traveled to Ireland with her maternal grandmother, mother, and father to visit remaining family members and to see her grandmother's house. While there, they traveled to the local Catholic convent school and were treated to tea by nuns who remembered her grandmother. The nuns treated the family well; much to the surprise of Aracella who thought the Catholics would shun her father, who was Protestant. This trip proved to be important to the family, because shortly after, her grandmother lost her memory, a victim of Pick's disease (much like Alzheimer's disease). Aracella told me that time and timing are important. In the case of this trip with her



grandmother, it took place at a significant time and allowed her to share an important event while her grandmother could remember it. With much ease, we begin a conversation about Aracella's father and his effect on her life.

### **Early Experiences with A Caring Father**

Unlike talking about her mother, Aracella spoke freely in copious amounts about her father, who owned a store in their small town. She discussed the friendships he formed, which served as a model for her. Aracella's father often sat "in the rocking chairs" with Israel Katz, a Jewish resident who owned Pringle's, a dry-goods store near her father's business. Often on her way home after school, Aracella would stop at her father's store to visit, sometimes enjoying a soda or an ice cream. Pringle's was a few doors away, and so she often found Katz and her father together, talking.

Katz "was a mystery to me because dad said he had gotten out of Poland just before World War II (WWII), and [Katz] was able to get his wife out" (Interview with Aracella). The Katz's first child was named Anna, who was a few years older. She knew his family worshipped in a larger city, since their small town did not have a synagogue. Curiosity got the best of her and she wanted to know about Katz's story, but her father said, "Oh no, honey. It's too painful for him to go back. Don't ever ask him, it's too painful" (Interview with Aracella). This painful experience was related in some way to the suffering of Jews in Europe and Europe was an important place for her father.

Aracella weaves her father's experiences and her understandings or conclusions as she continues to speak about her father as a young man stationed in Europe. Outside of WWII London, during his weekend time off duty, Aracella's father visited antique shops and would buy little teacups and send them home to his mother and grandmother. During his shopping trips, he

would spend time talking with the local people. Making the most of his time overseas, he would sometimes revisit a location that had suffered artillery or aerial bombardment from the Luftwaffe.

Aracella recounts parts of her father's story as told to her. There were entire "block(s) that would have been obliterated and he would wonder, 'I hope the people got out. Where did they go?'" (Interview with Aracella). When Aracella read *Anne Frank* in seventh grade, she was intrigued and began to think about and connect with her father's stories of being in Europe. Because Israel's daughter was named Anna, Aracella began to imagine what his Anna might have endured. In the book, the girl Anne Frank does not discuss her suffering in the camps because the book ends in 1944 when the family is discovered in hiding and therefore she uses her imagination to extend her thinking. She continues to make connections between her narration and her father's story.

While overseas, Aracella's father made friends with the Gleeves family, which included two children. She recounts this part of the story, from when she was a 12-year-old pre-adolescent. The Gleeves family had two daughters, one of whom married an American pilot and journeyed to live in the U.S. Aracella's father and mother took in this young woman while her husband was away on military assignments. Once united, the young woman and her military husband were transferred to another state; however, the families – the Gleeves in England, and their daughter and husband in the U.S. – remained connected with Aracella's family through pictures, cards, and letter writing. Later, when they reunited in England, the families enjoyed one another while sharing their common love for Bridge and citrus fruit.

Aracella tells another story, with her voice containing a slight lilt, as she expresses what her father shared. When her father first came home from his tour in England, he sent the Gleeves a box of ruby-red grapefruit because he thought they would enjoy it, since fruit was a scarce

commodity during the war. Mrs. Gleeves threw them all away because they were an unusual red color, and she thought they were spoiled. Aracella's family laughed about it and her father sent the Gleeves another box the following Christmas. Years later, Aracella took her husband to meet the Gleeves and they reminisced while drinking tea and eating cake, but would not talk about their particular war memories. One story in particular was not shared at that time with the Gleeves, but Aracella shared her father's story in our interview.

A small English town in which most of the young men had left to serve in the Royal Air Force (RAF) was left with only the very young or the very old. So, the remaining boys and men stood at the edge of town in the dark of night carrying pitchforks and ancient rifles in defense of their land. Her father said he was deeply moved by their bravery and became involved in helping these people. This story seems to underscore her father's love of the people he was sent to help protect. This is the only part of the interview in which Aracella has tears in her eyes, and there is compassion in her voice. Clearly, she has a connection with this part of his story, and "it was a connection that he really talked about" multiple times and she continues to tell it (Interview with Aracella).

In elementary school, Aracella played and went to school with a diverse set of children. She said in her town of 1,800 people, there was religious, ethnic, and racial diversity. She expresses that she just understood people were different, yet the same; she was able to accept difference and realize the sameness of humans in general, due to the example her parents modeled to her. As a middle school student, she attended her mother's alma mater, an all girls' school in a nearby large metropolitan city. There, she met many Jewish students with whom she became close friends. Some of these girls' grandparents were Holocaust survivors. Aracella

remembers a great deal of cultural acceptance: some of the Jewish girls celebrated Christmas with Aracella and she, a Catholic, celebrated Hanukkah with them.

### **Lucy Mae McDonald and the School Board**

Aracella's father also served on the school board of their small town. Aracella calls his attitude "forward thinking," and he "pushed for lots of things that I wasn't aware of as a child." During this time period, there was only segregation in everyday life, of which school was part. There was a *black school* and a *white school*, but her father was on the school board that oversaw both schools. She said, "He was always pushing for a science lab and foreign language for the black school" (Interview with Aracella). And, he was in close contact with Lucy Mae McDonald, a black woman who was principal of the black school. Aracella shares one memory of McDonald "sitting at the dining room table, talking with daddy and laying out papers, going over things" (Interview with Aracella). Aracella described McDonald as tall and beautiful, with her hair in a bun, wearing bold earrings. Always in a suit and heels, "she looked like a million bucks" (Interview with Aracella) and Aracella wanted to be a teacher like McDonald. The hard work her father and McDonald did together paid off, when years later, while Aracella was attending college, her father telephoned her to inform Aracella that the town had finally named McDonald superintendent of the consolidated schools. He added that the now Lucy Mae McDonald, PhD., was one of only three people living in town who held a doctorate; the other two were medical doctors. He let Aracella know that McDonald, of all people, deserved to be named superintendent. After successfully serving as superintendent, McDonald went on to be a professor at a university.

McDonald's endorsement was met with opposition from townspeople and Aracella vividly recalls her mother protecting her from threatening phone calls that came late at night. As an adult,

Aracella knows those calls had to do with race relations, threatening her parents for their support of one of the few black leaders in their midst. Her father's support of a minority woman as well as a racially integrated school system was not part of the common thinking in the rural U.S. south during the 1950s. Around this time, Aracella was finishing her first degree and began teaching in college.

### **A Serendipitous Encounter**

During her first job as an adjunct professor, Aracella took a course in modern European history as part of her master's degree. The professor "included a large segment on the Jewish Holocaust in WWII" (Writing Prompt, Aracella). She says, "it planted a seed in my thinking" that someday I would "introduce students to Holocaust literature, I hoped" (Writing Prompt, Aracella). The professor introduced, *They Thought They Were Free*, a book written by Milton Mayer (1955). It is a "book about journalists who return to a small town in Germany in the 1950s. The author discovers that most of the inhabitants were somewhat complacent about Jews who had disappeared from their town" (Interview with Aracella). Only a few villagers question the disappearance, and others ignore or forget who once lived there. She remarks that it is possible for human people to act in inhumane ways, and apathy is one of the largest culprits for the excuses villagers gave. She says, "My learning is to understand that a nightmare scenario can easily happen even amongst thinking, intelligent people." This knowledge helps her realize that we must watch our freedom and "be aware of even something as simple as our neighbors" (Interview with Aracella). She explains that we must be observant and care for one another. Unlike the German townspeople who never questioned the disappearance of people who lived in their town, but were different from them and therefore their absence goes unchecked.

Using pull-quotes from this book, she taught her high school students to read and personally connect to each segment of the assigned readings. In our interviews, she strongly reiterated that we should watch out for each other and question occurrences that make us realize that “something is wrong” (Interview with Aracella). She is referencing German and Polish society when neighbors went missing or were rounded up and other people never questioned these disappearances. She asserted that she is not one to ignore what is happening around her, and is willing to be disturbed and then do something to improve a situation.

Aracella began teaching and enjoyed working with high school students. She found that discussion groups were good pedagogy to get students thinking. In addition, she took time to think about the taught-curriculum, so that it “includes more readings, discussion forums, and writing prompts” (Interview with Aracella). Around this time, she was introduced to the Holocaust. Aracella continues with this story saying, “One of her college students was working at a nice menswear store” and invited Aracella to visit her. That day, Aracella was introduced to another saleswoman. Over time, Aracella and this saleswoman made small talk as they occasionally shopped together. At Easter during her second year of teaching high school students, Aracella was invited to a local church where Holocaust survivors and survivor children were speaking about their experiences and explained the following:

A serendipitous moment occurred. At Easter, I heard that Holocaust survivors and children of survivors would be speaking at the First Presbyterian Church. Imagine my surprise, when I walked in and heard the saleswoman, my friend (from the menswear store) speaking. When I rushed up to her afterwards, she said, ‘[Aracella] I always wondered if you wanted to know my story.’ My response was, ‘Of course, I want to hear all you want to tell me.’ Well, that began a whole new

level of friendship. She was gracious enough to come to my classes and speak and then introduced me to other Holocaust teachers in (town) through the education branch of the Jewish Federation (of the town in which she lives). That was the beginning of at least 15 years of teaching Holocaust literature during a mini-mester at Case High School (pseudonym), attending Holocaust teaching seminars, attending the Bearing Witness Conference in Washington, D.C., at the U.S. Holocaust Museum (USHMM), and later hosting (survivor) Gerda Weismann Klein. My students created a weaving for Mrs. Klein with quotations from her autobiography, *All But My Life*, and presented it to her that evening (Writing prompt, Aracella).

Initially, as a new teacher in a prestigious Catholic school, she was responsible for developing an elective short-course that would take place in January (mini-mester), but she did not have a topic. Several events happened at around the same time that resulted in Aracella's initial engagement with Holocaust teaching. On her own, she began to do some research on the history of the Holocaust with the intent on teaching it. Not everyone at the school was supportive. "A history teacher said to me, 'Don't teach anything about the Holocaust... it's too painful and kids don't show enough respect. I wouldn't touch it,'" Aracella explained (Interview with Aracella). She said this felt like they were "throwing down the gauntlet." Aracella accepted that she felt the subject was important despite discouragement shared by more experienced staff. Therefore, she was determined to continue to learn and to teach, anyway. She said she started with Holocaust survivor stories and Aracella reminds me that she did not quit her initial attempts, which over time resulted in her teaching a well-developed Holocaust class, and she improved her knowledge because she took time to learn.

## Change in Practice and Pedagogy

During the first couple of years into her Holocaust teaching and in the same school mentioned above, she taught using Holocaust survivors' testimony and "we had read about four or five" when one of the boys said, "I am kind of on overload. I'm not sure I can read anymore or see any more videos. I think I am becoming callous to this and I don't want to be" (Interview with Aracella). Realizing how important this was, she accepted this feedback and attempted to shift her practice. Afterward, she began to conduct research about America's involvement during the war and especially into U.S. omissions or commissions, resulting in inaction. Discovering that she could not overload students in one area without providing a "broader" picture that "needed to be bigger than just survivor stories and the stories of people in the camps." She realized she wanted to provide more historical context of "what happened in the rest of the world during this period, which paid attention, and who did not, and connect it more to what we can do today" (Interview with Aracella).

As a result of listening to student feedback, Aracella changed her practice through widening her scope. She developed a curriculum that involved taking her students to the city library and microfiche researching. She taught them how to locate and conduct research in newspapers published during the years that encompassed WWII. Students discovered that news regarding Auschwitz and U.S. involvement in WWII could be located on the front page of the newspaper published in her town during the years in question. But, as the war progressed, coverage about concentration camps and U.S. involvement to stop the plight of Jews suffering persecution were buried in the back pages. Therefore, according to Aracella, the idea of U.S. involvement in the suffering of people in Europe was also buried. Strong evidence such as the plight of Jewish people during WWII, the *MS St. Louis* with its predominately Jewish passenger



manifest being rejected from ports in Cuba, and the isolationism of the U.S. prove her point.

Aracella's students began to see and understand the position of bystander at a governmental level by the U.S. and the effect this had on the suffering of others. She responds to my question about how her learning has developed with regard to Holocaust education:

My learning changed. Oh goodness! That's hard to say, metacognitive question here. I guess I became somewhat more interested in also America's response and what we did and did not do and what we could and could not do because I see that as...actually right now, of course this didn't happen while I was teaching but right now with all the Syrian refugees and that question, it so reminds me of the ship that was trying to land in America, first in Cuba and then on our shores and we never let it (Interview with Aracella).

She reminds me that, "It's not just about this Holocaust (Shoah of 1933-45), but about Holocausts that are going on today in the Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and all over the world, and "when the tanks are rolling, it's too late" (Interview with Aracella) to start studying about these conditions or attempting to prevent them. Aracella has enlarged her ability to teach so that students recognize large ideas that include history and humanity of then and present day. She challenged her students to be aware, cognitively engaged, and willing to act before it is too late.

Attending educational opportunities has increased her ability to understand the topic and to develop different curricula. She visited the USHMM for training and while there she participated in experiencing the museum by following their curriculum. She held "a card with a victim's name," and then she toured the museum from the top floor, descending as she viewed each display so she would end the tour on the first floor (Interview with Aracella). She said one does

not know if the person on their card survived until they reach the bottom floor, and when the person's fate is revealed, this "made the experience very personal" (Interview with Aracella).

### *From Mismanagement to a Functioning Classroom*

At first, her classroom was home to mismanaged time and unruly students. She laughed as she told me about how she divided her first class by seating students separately by those who did not want to learn and those who told her they did. She said she taught all the students during the first 15 minutes of class and let the unruly ones do whatever they wanted to for the rest of the time. Aracella's change started with her learning. One opportunity in particular was training at the USHMM where teachers – the trainees – heard multiple survivors speak and then were responsible in giving feedback to the crowd that had gathered for this national training. Teachers were grouped together and assigned to select a spokesperson. Aracella's group selected her as their representative to speak to the crowd because she was not easily moved to tears. Afterward, presenting her group's feedback in front of the rest of the room, she remembered feeling, "This is my mission, and I've sort of been anointed by this group to talk, to speak, and never to be quiet about this" (Interview with Aracella).

With each new learning opportunity came new resources and new inspiration. Reading Berenbaum's (2006) work gave her ideas about which information students needed to understand regarding an overview of Holocaust history. As her experience increased, Aracella improved her student engagement through refined teaching of brought-in topics such as racism brought in under Nazi control (e.g., anti-Semitism, gradualism and the Nuremberg Laws). Then she began using additional survivor stories, which led to using the book and then the film, *Schindler's List*. She reminds me that her mini-mester course (the one she taught and developed during time at the high school at which she taught) was one-month long and she carefully curated the materials

used to maximize learning during that month. Some of her selections were Gerda Weissman Klein's, *All But My Life* (1957) and Viktor Frankl's, *Man's Search For Meaning* (2006), Simon Wiesenthal's *Sunflowers* (1970), and Deborah Lipstadt's books on Holocaust denial. She states it is important for students to know and understand there are people who still to this day deny the Holocaust, and "how insidious they are in rewriting history" (Interview with Aracella).

### *Allowing Students to Learn the Unexpected*

Aracella used very little historical fiction, however, some of her students would become enraptured with the topic and begin to write their own "fiction of a person in a camp and their survival techniques." She remembers one boy in particular and she explains that, "I squashed him and I feel badly about that now" (Interview with Aracella). Thinking about different approaches to learning, for instance considering a post-modern approach to history, she "began to realize that there was a way for kids to connect, to make their own story out of the other stories they were exposed to" (Interview with Aracella). At first she did not understand how allowing students to do this did not damage their understanding of history; however, she changed her practice to allow students to read and write fictive pieces in addition to the required assignments so that they could make sense of what they were learning. During her high school mini-mester class, she required students to read a book a week, and to take quizzes over reading and viewing assignments. In addition, each student created a portfolio of 10 responses to reading essays assigned by the teacher to encourage students to make personal connections to the content writings (Teacher artifact, Aracella).

Many students had not traveled to the USHMM or to Europe to see camp remains, and she thinks their imagination cultivated during their fictive writing pieces helped them make deep connections to Holocaust education, especially when generated from accepted historical facts she

taught during the mini-mester. Evidence of her careful and evolved lessons are indicated in her writing and shows the purpose of her class and her hoped effects on students' knowledge and ability to interact with Holocaust history. The following is from her writing she had previously done:

Yet, an increasingly vocal group of survivors and others have stated that silence perpetuates the Nazi crimes against humanity and their legacy in hate groups today. In light of some revisionist history that would dispute the validity of the Holocaust, it is incumbent on those who know the truth to speak out. Many writers today in the year 2001, say that in order not to repeat the horror, even to a lesser degree, we must keep alive an awareness of the events which transpired against the Jewish people, 1933-1945 (Answers to writing prompt, Aracella).

Aracella reiterates that her students must remain aware, and be able to address aspects of Holocaust understanding as they encounter opportunities in their daily lives. She writes in her printed curriculum, "This was the general opinion, that language could not fully encompass the insanity of the death camps. Therefore, attempts to address the Holocaust through literature were considered futile acts in the 1950s and early 1960" (Teacher artifact No.1, Aracella). The Holocaust was once thought beyond understanding; however, Aracella shifted her teaching to facilitate her students' connection to history, and uses fiction and nonfiction sources as a balanced method of understanding history and the human interactions of that history. Students cannot give a firsthand account, but they must bear witness using whatever language they possess. She created learning opportunities to help her students learn so they might attest to the suffering of others.

### *Commitment to Learning Within and Beyond the Classroom*

Aracella believes in “metacognitive questions” and she pauses to think about changes she has made to her teaching. She believes that teaching in general, and especially the teaching of this subject, requires listening to students and intense personal studying that leads to actions, which enhance the lives of others.

The following stories take place during one summer when this teacher attended a local university’s course for teachers of Advanced Placement (AP) in Language. During this training, teachers were assigned to read several primary works, one of which was *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1966). Adolph Eichmann was responsible for deportation of Jews from Germany and conducted other mass deportation. His capture awakened the world to the Holocaust, and Arendt’s text was instrumental in this advent. Arendt’s text covers “Eichmann’s capture, trial, and death and the writing style itself is difficult because of her ironic tone” (Interview with Aracella). The text was written in the 1960s and for many Jews, there was still bitterness. According to Aracella, this spills over into Arendt’s text. After reading and concentrating her study on the Eichmann text, Aracella and two other teachers who constituted the members of her group spent the summer writing an extensive, detailed, and complex teaching unit on Arendt’s text. This unit provides notes and suggestions, questions, and references for the teacher in addition there is a syllabus, original writing prompts and essay exemplars, and comparative literature assignments that involve modern songs and movie (Teacher Artifact No. 2, Aracella).

In addition, she shows another written Holocaust curriculum, which she says she is proud of, and that she selected key portions and used yearly with students. It includes a syllabus and timetable for teaching, articles for classroom use, original curriculum, maps and documents from other sources designed to build students’ knowledge about historical context, content, and critical

thinking. Her article selections are nonfiction and have a wide variety of topics, including Lipstadt's (1993) book about Holocaust denial. Aracella does not entertain that Holocaust denial should be part of the Holocaust story as deniers argue. But, she wants students to be aware that deniers and Holocaust denial exists and they must be vigilant to speak out against it. Many people question her efforts in studying and teaching about an event that happened 70 years ago. But, on many levels, this type of persecution and annihilation is happening today, "I have to overcome that, the unbelief and denial that many people espouse" (Interview with Aracella).

Commitment to scholarship has fueled her desire to continue to influence her world, "to make speaking up and standing up her mission" (Interview with Aracella) in her life. One area she discussed in great detail was the idea of Catholics and Jews coming together to make peace with the anti-Semitic lie, which purports Jews are responsible for the death of Christ. In her scope of influence, Aracella is unafraid to educate about the history of anti-Semitism. For example, she informed a high-ranking official in the local Catholic diocese about a swastika carved into a rock that was then placed on church grounds. The head of the church immediately had this rock removed. Anti-Semitism was one of the reasons given for annihilation of the Jews in Nazi Germany; however, this prejudice began in the first century.

When teaching students, she never introduced or dwelled on the "horrors of the Holocaust," rather she prepared students by first teaching the context of history and that of WWII. She taught vocabulary and correct terminology, so students could answer and dialogue using appropriate language. Students must be thought to think and then about what to think. "Our role as teachers is to present the truth" and this is why she personalized history by using primary sources. For this teacher, the truth with regard to factual information is verified through multiple sources and scholarship. "Real teachers must guide students to determine and use references, and

not accept snippets on the Internet as information that is deep” or truthful (Interview with Aracella). Real teachers also listen to their students “personally so they (students) can learn” (Interview with Aracella). Once she drove her students in a van to see a museum-sponsored display in another city. Often students will polarize or isolate when they are uncomfortable. They may not sit with teachers unless they are forced to do so. Aracella remembers the ride back from this adventure. The students kept talking about what they had seen and heard and asked questions that came from a place of deep thinking and wonder; “This is the kind of dialogue and learning one hopes to have with one’s students” (Interview with Aracella).

In her post-teaching life, Aracella continues to serve on a committee that promotes and sponsors Holocaust education in her city. She reads, studies, and continues to attend different lectures especially surrounding the Holocaust. The present political climate is alarming because racist rhetoric is promoted and concern over its role in our society is seen as banal. She recalls the years of 1939 and beyond, when the U.S. entered the war, were preceded by 1933 and the years of discrimination and prejudice that went rampant and unchecked. In other words, the annihilation of the Jews and the persecution of millions more began because of unchecked power and the influence this had on every citizen. She continues to be “nervous” about the role of Holocaust denial and how this will affect future generations of people especially after all survivors are no longer living. Additionally, she thinks the general public thinks the Holocaust is an irrelevant event that happened 70 years ago and that learning about it is unnecessary. To combat the potential of historical callousing that could lead to belief of what deniers say, she thinks teachers need to continue to teach about the Holocaust.

We are living in a time of terrorism, and at a time when people want to “build walls to keep certain people out. That disturbs me and makes me feel that we are repeating history and

vilifying certain groups of people” (Interview with Aracella). Holocaust education that considers the other in this day and age is significant and important in helping us understand that the situation that made the Holocaust possible has not disappeared. “When we see other people as bad because they are not like us, we create a facelessness and allow wholesale labeling of people we don’t even know” (Interview with Aracella). She says she has many friends who challenge her position, and she holds up her own belief that balanced information means not depending on emotional rhetoric, and requires one to research these complex ideas, think, and listen to people who do not agree with you.

This teacher’s early life and exposure to different people built her foundation of accepting others. She accepts teaching and speaking about Holocaust education even though she has officially retired and does not presently teach in a classroom with school-age children, her work continues. She speaks with confidence about the positive role she has played in facilitating learning of students and now informally through her committee work. It is clear that despite a change in job titles, she continues to be connected to Holocaust education.

#### Nanci’s Story: “I Learn Something New Everyday”

*First they came for the Socialist, and I did  
not speak out-  
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionist, and I  
Did not speak out-  
Because I was not a trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not  
Speak out-  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me-and there was no one  
Left to speak for me (Martin Niemöller, German pastor 1892-1984)*



“I was planning to be a lawyer because I actually did not plan on going into teaching,” Nanci said as she sat across the large wooden table, occasionally touching her straight, dark hair (Interview with Nanci). Born in South Vietnam, she is the offspring of an American military father and a Vietnamese mother. Nanci’s mother married her father, but she has very little memory of her mother and father living together as a family. She recalls that her father was in her life until she was in kindergarten. The two divorced, and when he left, she and her mother moved to Guam. At age 12 her mother remarried a U.S. Air Force serviceman and the new family moved to the state of Maine, on the U.S. east coast. Typical of military families, while she was a young child the family moved several times. She moved to a Midwest state to attend university, remaining in the state for a little more than 20 years. She has one half-sister who is 13 years younger and lives in another state.

### **Recognizing Difference**

Nanci recalls her time living on the island of Guam, describing it as a tropical place and she had access to the beach every week. There were no seasons on the island and she did not see snow until moving to Maine. Before moving to the U.S., she had an opportunity to travel to Japan, which added to the understanding that she was different. Being easily identified as a child of mixed race in the overarching Asian culture – in which she thinks most people share distinctive ethnic resemblance – was mentally impactful to Nanci’s life. Everyone was “native Guamanian, Filipino, or Japanese, or Korean, but they were more full-blood” and she was a ‘Halfling’ so to speak (Interview with Nanci). I look back on pictures and I was quite tan, but still very light [in complexion] compared to others; I looked almost white,” she explained. Her father was white [Caucasian] and the other children did not have white parents (Interview with

Nanci); she was visibly different and was picked on. This experience had a profound effect on how she understood bullying and of being the other.

### College Years

Nanci was a compliant child and attended the university her parents chose for her, which brought her to the state in which she presently lives. She thought she would be a lawyer; however, before college, she took a class in television production and then decided she should go into telecommunications. Not feeling totally secure in this choice, she was searching for the proper path when a friend who was a business major suggested she switch to business, but she soon realized this major also was not for her. The massive amounts of numbers, computing, and then math “not being her strong suit” convinced her to choose another major (Interview with Nanci). She began to notice that she enjoyed history. When study groups were formed, other students wanted to be in her group. It was then she realized she had a “knack for teaching, so I decided to switch my major to teaching social studies. I found my little niche” (Interview with Nanci).

I had a lot of humanities courses that were required at my university. I noticed that whenever we’d form study groups, I would have a ton of kids just with me all the time when we were doing study groups. I realized maybe I have a knack for teaching, so I decided to switch my major to teaching social studies. I found my little niche there. That’s how it all started (Interview with Nanci).

She always took a lot of notes and she had a “knack for explaining in a way that other people understood” (Interview with Nanci). A copious note-taker, she also enjoyed sharing and comparing hers with others to determine areas in which she was weak. One of her professors relied less on lecture and more on discussion, allowing students to share their thoughts and did

not spend the entire class time talking while students listened. Nanci admired him and decided to pattern her teaching after his because:

He was one of those people that, he was just straight to the point. If the lecture took 20 minutes, he did his lecture and then he was done and we were just dismissed. I really enjoyed that, rather than just going on and on about a bunch of, I don't know, anything that I didn't understand, he got straight to the point, was pretty factual, was pretty entertaining. I think he was probably one of my mentors without realizing it...(Interview with Nanci).

### **Starting to Teach**

Soon after beginning her teaching career, she began to include the Holocaust in her teaching. She says it was compelling because “it was hard for me to understand how a human being could treat other human beings that way” (Interview with Nanci). She says Holocaust studies made her aware of her empathy with other people, especially the “underdog type of situation” (Interview with Nanci). She recalls the painful feeling of being different, and being treated differently because of her parentage and skin color. She explains:

I don't necessarily remember too much bullying. Nothing overt, but it was just this sense of kind of being an outsider. Even when we went back to Vietnam to visit my mother's side of the family, obviously I stood out very much so from my cousins and etc. I can remember kids yelling out in Vietnamese that I was an American person as I'm walking down the street. Obviously, I stood out that much. It was this inherent knowledge that I was different, that I didn't really fit perfectly anywhere (Interview with Nanci).

Nanci teaches her high school students with the understanding that they need Holocaust education. The Holocaust is a part of 20<sup>th</sup> century history and therefore applicable to her Pre-AP and AP World History classes. She sees her teaching about the Holocaust as a significant part of her teaching, and one that she began early in her teaching career and fueled by her own learning. Sometimes teaching the Holocaust is “difficult because students have a general knowledge and so they think they know everything there is to know” (Interview with Nanci). She describes her job is to “basically break through student understanding from general to understanding the human responses” (Interview with Nanci). That is to say, the Holocaust is not just about “facts and figures... but about the human mind and the human condition.” Nanci continues to explain that the Holocaust is about profiling specific groups of people. Even if you have gone through that type of difficulty, the idea is that “hopefully those patterns of behavior are not repeated” (Interview with Nanci). She wants her students to be thinkers about what they do and what they say.

### **Teacher Learning Shifts Teaching and Inclusion of Holocaust Education**

Nanci remarks that conferences designed to instruct teachers about the Holocaust have been instrumental in helping her become more versed on the topic. Attending museum seminars in her state and neighboring states, and hearing survivor testimony and learning about a wide variety of topics and perspectives, has helped her grow as a teacher. She remembers:

I can't remember when exactly what year I started teaching the Holocaust, but I remember it was fairly early, within probably the first few years of my teaching career. We are required. There's always an element in the curriculum objectives in the state where we're required to teach the Holocaust and genocide and different things like that in history. But, I remember going to this conference in

another state. They would bring in different survivors and stuff from the Holocaust. I remember hearing what really struck me, was (hearing from) Kurt Klein. His wife was Gerda Weissman Klein. She wrote *All But My Life* (Interview with Nanci).

Nanci learned about how survivors “resisted, fought back, and mentally sought to triumph over tragedy” (Interview with Nanci). Learning about these survivor stories helped Nanci instruct students about resistance and increased her content knowledge so she could give students a fuller picture of this historical event. Soon after that training, she really started to make a decision that when she was teaching sophomores, and after their tests were over:

I was going to go ahead and do a Holocaust unit during that time and I would set up just a page of instructions. It was a big project for them. It was a big grade. Then, I also wrote a foundation grant at school to get a book called *Images of the Holocaust*, which is broken up into basically 10 sub-segments. The project includes everything from rumblings of danger, the beginnings of before anyone realized what life in the camps (was actually like), going and hiding, and displacement after the war, etc. It had all these different units, I’d have the kids read at least one story per unit and write a summary of the story as well as their personal reaction. I wanted them to try to basically empathize and realize the hardships that people go through and how these things are still committed every day, the persecution and the discrimination and the idea of us versus them. Anyone who’s different is evil, etc. That’s not necessarily true. You fear what you don’t know. You need to try to know people for themselves, not by what they [seem to] represent (Interview with Nanci).

Nanci suggests that she relates to difficult subjects first through visual methods, such as movies. She remarks that in recent years, Hollywood films have done much to provide us with visual teaching materials. She states, *The Pianist*, and *Schindler's List* are very good films and students watch them on their own adding to increased level of engagement within Holocaust studies for her and her students. Sometimes, there is not time in class to view all of the possible movies, but she makes suggestions to students and in this way, they have an opportunity develop their understanding. Some students have traveled, adding to increased interest and understanding especially if the travel has been to specific Holocaust-related places like Dachau.

Nanci says she believes her use of film, writing responses to literature, and historical research created greater respect for the victims and survivors. "Students need to have their eyes open to their own daily behavior" (Writing response, Nanci). She helps her students empathize with and understand the other person. She states her curriculum is "one that kids see [learn] as something new and [in which] they are required to do their own thinking." Equally important is that they respond on a "conscious level, their heart is touched or they appear to show empathy" (Interview with Nanci). Years later as young adults, they express their engagement with statements such as, "I never forgot that one thing we did (in class related to Holocaust education)" (Interview with Nanci). As she has grown in her own knowledge, she has developed a way to select and develop different pedagogical methods. Her own engagement with Holocaust education comes from pure enjoyment of 20th century history and she believes that 80 percent of her students also enjoy this time period. Next, I discuss some of her pedagogical choices.

### *Understanding History*

"Having the Holocaust so entwined with [World War II], helps [students] to stay engaged" (Interview with Nanci). The teacher is also able to teach students the context of World War II,

and the additional war against the Jews. “They [begin] to realize that while the war’s going on, so is all this other stuff... simultaneously. For example, the U.S. enters WWII in 1939, however, Hitler has been in power since 1933 and people have already been persecuted and murdered and no one has done anything” (Interview with Nanci). This understanding leads into a pedagogy that deals with the complexity of history as it relates to Holocaust studies. She says that students need to understand these people were citizens. “Their citizenship rights were taken away; they were kicked out of school, kicked out of their jobs, and their daily life became difficult, and their synagogues were burned” (Interview with Nanci). She emphasizes that high school students do not understand the gradual effect of persecution. Through various methods, she attempts to inform students of the insidious effect of losing one’s rights, and they must realize that this could be their life: “this could have been you” (Interview with Nanci).

### *Simulation*

Nanci uses a cattle car simulation learned at one of the museum trainings. Directly instructing students to imagine they are going on a trip and to pack what they can carry, she does not tell them what they can bring or the length of the trip. She explains that she tapes off a section of her room and tells her students to “pack themselves into that section and while they are standing there, they start to become uncomfortable” (Interview with Nanci). She finds that students bring nonessential items – like their phones – but no one thinks to bring food or water. She says this lesson is important because she uses it to begin to build empathy for those who have suffered. She says her students need to understand that “this was nothing compared to what you would face once you got to a camp.” Understanding from this perspective helps students to see that things get progressively worse and worse. From this perspective, she “wants students to

see the resilience and strength these people [used] to endure” and she wants her students to have respect for the lives of victims and survivors (Interview with Nanci).

### *Art Projects*

Nanci asked students to do several art-based projects that when finished, each student will add to a portfolio they will complete, which culminates most of their learning within their class. During our followup interview, she brought several of her assignments and explained how she taught each portion this past school year. She explained the window to teach Holocaust studies was shorter this year due to a teacher walkout, which affected the school calendar resulting in a shortened time to teach altogether. Yet, she chose to develop a class activity that combined literacy and an art response over several days. She selected specific nonfiction readings that students could access by studying either together or alone. While students spent several timed segments with each article, they took notes on each of their readings that consisted of excerpts from the nonfiction work *Night* (Elie Wiesel, 1958) and articles on the following: Jewish ghettos, deportation and transfer, concentration camp life, liberation, and the Nuremberg trials all researched from the USHMM. She used class discussion and group/peer discussion time to assist students with understanding the texts. Afterward, each student was assigned to create a booklet that included an interpretive drawing of key things from their individual learning, notes from each article, and a response to literature. The teacher’s expectation for the assignment was that each product should be well done; have overall quality with regard to writing and drawing; and include descriptive, narrative, and reflective writing.

During other years, when time was not compressed due to additional testing mandates, Nanci devoted time in particular to the butterfly activity. Students study the poetry of children from Terezin and create an artful butterfly for each Terezin child they study, and the butterflies



are displayed. Then they read the fate of each child and take down a butterfly that represents a child who has perished (I Never Saw Another Butterfly, 1993). Visually, this is an influential lesson for students. One day there are many paper butterflies and at the appointed time most are taken down to represent the perished; there are only a few left. Students seem to be influenced and are touched by how quickly their butterflies (children) have disappeared because they did not survive. The teacher then asks students to reflect on their own lives through questioning them about incidents in which they were in a bullying situation and did nothing. In other words, how many times “have you been a bystander in a situation in which you would have done something? What do you do? Do you walk away? Or are you the person to be the advocate, to step in and help?” she asks her students (Artifact, Nanci). Nanci says most of her students are in situations in which they are bystanders and so she wants them to understand their own sense of responsibility and that “someone else is not going to take care of it.” They must be the ones to act responsibly when no one else will (Interview with Nanci).

### *Nonfiction*

Nanci uses a book, *Images from the Holocaust* (1996) because it has several sections that deal with different aspects of the Holocaust, such as liberation to life after the camps. There are pictures, poetry, prose, and autobiography and this gives students a variety of choices in how they choose to interact with a specific piece. Students are responsible to read, summarize, and respond to a chosen piece of writing. They must adopt the author’s perspective, placing them into the other’s point of view and determining what they would do under the same circumstances. After the first couple of years of this project, Nanci knew that she would refine it and improve the quality of the assignments. When students complained, “We can’t do 10 stories,” she reminded them that because “these stories are literally like a page or two,” you have to read more

than one or two pieces, so students can see patterns in the writing and develop rich responses that deal with content and emotional connection in greater detail.

Poetry, as an art form, can be very powerful as in the case of the Hangman poem and activity. *The Hangman*, by Maurice Ogden, is a poem that illustrates through numerous verses what happens when one is a bystander. “The moral of the story is, He (the hangman) started doing for all these people and no one spoke up, and then he came for me” (Interview with Nanci). If the townspeople (in the poem) had stood up to the hangman “instead of being fearful and selfish” and “procuring their own safety,” and “willing to give up someone else” until there is no one left. She hopes to teach this lesson well enough that the children realize sometimes it is just better to take a stand and take the risk, then to allow bad things to happen to other people” (Interview with Nanci). After discussing the theme of this poem, the teacher directs her students to write a response and to address how one’s safety is sometimes at the mercy of the care of others. She knows that students are emotionally engaged with this poem and it is her hope that students will begin to question their own motives and to expand their own sense of altruism.

### **Developing Student Disposition through Curriculum and Teaching**

Often what students do not understand becomes irrelevant to them, and what is irrelevant is easily dismissed. Nanci gives an example of students who travel to Holocaust memorials. This she says “is cool, these people are just near tombs, stones or pillars,” however when they take “selfies” like doing a “yoga pose up against a pillar near the crematory ovens...that’s just so disrespectful” (Interview with Nanci). She asks her students, “Would you go to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C., or Arlington Cemetery in Virginia, and do that? There are certain places that are sacred. “We had a discussion over this” and as such [new] issues come up in class” more opportunities for further discussion arise (Interview with Nanci).

Nanci states that her travel to Israel when she was a younger person influenced her understanding of the Jewish people and their history. This made her keenly aware of her own Christian background, which gave her a basic understanding of Bible stories and the Old Testament. She says, “the evolution of what the Jews have gone through throughout history from ancient times” is significant, and the concepts of anti-Semitism, as a very old concept, made sense to her as she traveled and had her mind and understanding expanded.

*“Do You Have the Strength to Do the Right Thing?”*

Students who appear hardened, at first seem “unsympathetic, but every once in a while they will say something that lets me know they are paying attention, especially during Holocaust studies” (Interview with Nanci). Often the “kids who come from broken homes or abusive situations, don’t have empathy for others. But, then there is something that cracks that shell... it is eye-opening to see this in specific kids,” Nanci observes (Interview with Nanci). Students respond to this material in a very appropriate way” (Interview with Nanci). Very few students “respond in such a way that lacks respect, and this impresses me” (Interview with Nanci). The teacher’s interest in Holocaust education continues to be fueled and informed through her own learning about subjects and people as related to her own sense of altruism and then developing this in her students. She recalls some of her favorite teaching stories, and this showcases her own learning. One is about a non-Jewish Polish nurse named, Irene Gut Opdyke.

Opdyke joined the Polish underground, but was captured by the Russians and sent to aid Russian soldiers at a hospital behind enemy lines. After being captured by Germans, she caught the eye of S.S. Officer Eduard Rugemer and he took her to be his housekeeper. Rugemer’s home was near the ghetto in the city of Radom, Poland, which he oversaw. Therefore due to proximity, Opdyke witnessed mass killings, random violence and the murdering of Jewish prisoners. After

the ghetto was liquidated, Jews who were servants in Rugemer's home were in grave danger.

Opdyke hid an entire house of Jewish servants when their lives were threatened, helping them survive. Soon this plan was discovered and Opdyke begged for their lives. In exchange, Rugemer forced her to become his mistress. Miraculously, Opdyke took the Jews she was hiding into the forest, where they joined Russian forces as they marched to liberated ghettos and camps.

Nanci reinforces with her students the understanding that Polish people were tortured and under extreme duress, so they would not be willing to help Jews. Opdyke's act of courage was an act of sacrifice of herself. "There are maybe a million stories of people who had nothing to gain and yet, went through that unselfish salvation" (Interview with Nanci). It is important for students to ask themselves, "How far am I willing to go to help my fellow man?" (Interview with Nanci). Stories like that of Anne Frank are well known, and there are many others that should be told, and Opdyke's is one of them.

### **Teaching Holocaust Education as a Deposit Against Violence**

A significant lesson from stories similar to that of Opdyke's is how students can respond to violence. For example, the teacher is in discussion with her students and asks them questions such as, "Why is it that crime happens in certain neighborhoods and not others? Who is picked on in school? Who are considered weak or scapegoats? Students seem to identify that those who are different and weaker are brutalized and traumatized by bullying behavior" (Interview with Nanci). Then when bystanders do nothing, the victims are subject to more horrific behavior.

Nanci continues to explain her process. She discusses her conversation, "New kids that come to the school; it is easy for them to get lost in a crowd. And so, our school assigns a lunch buddy." She encourages her students to fill this role and "care for your fellow human being because these actions have a snowball effect." She smiles when she says she encourages her

students to recognize choices they make as models for others to do the right thing, and this is about “paying it forward” (Interview with Nanci). She expects students to be able to deal with caring for others because they only have “first-world problems” (Interview with Nanci). She explains first-world problems as not problems of survival, but of wanting material possessions. Yet, her students continue to surprise her with their maturity, and this aids her continued engagement.

Because of her emphasis on Holocaust education, she states her students keep others accountable for their actions. For example in class, they will “condemn each other”... “against stray comments and force each other to apologize” for obnoxious, unthinking, or uncaring comments (Interview with Nanci). She finds her students very interested in Holocaust studies; they appreciate their lives, and they begin to see they have power to “make changes as an individual even if it’s just the littlest decision” (Interview with Nanci). The teacher states she is aware of and therefore makes her students aware that the Holocaust was the most severe case of “human rights violations” and it is important that students be continually aware. She says she does not want to “skimp on anything,” especially having students understand how they can devalue others, by their actions or inaction. She challenges them to be active in their world because “if not for fate or luck, they would be facing different life circumstances.” She states in light of our “current political system, ... there’s almost an open forum on being openly discriminatory.” The teacher says this sticks in her “craw” and she despises the attitude that allows the “demonization aspect” (Interview with Nanci). She explains this is having a very narrow view of who is a “real American.” In other words, if someone “looks like them, acts like them, speaks like them, thinks like them; this emphasizes the us versus them mentality and it also verifies the falseness of human relationships,” especially if these are the people that one accepts

and all others are not accepted. She says this kind of relationship is very narrow, but is very present in our culture; Students are constantly presented with the ability to widen their perspective or be close-minded in daily life. She also explains an urban versus rural mentality. Those in urban settings have “more experiences with different types of people.” There may be more acceptance and you see others as people, and “you can still be kind and gentle and have the right to believe what you want to” (Interview with Nanci).

In rural areas “where literally everyone knows each other and everyone thinks the same, there is less diversity, no outside reflections with anyone else different from them and if there is, that outside person is automatically wrong” (Interview with Nanci). Added to this narrowed-thinking is religion. Those who have closed minds also add, “God said so” (Interview with Nanci). Nanci makes sure to emphasize that the “us versus them” mentality of the Shoah can happen at any time, and is happening today. She reminds that where she teaches fits into the stereotypical rural setting that of “mostly white, mostly Christian.” Many of her students think the United States is a Christian nation, and those who do not profess Christianity are evil. She says we are not a Christian nation, and those who are not Christians are not evil. She expounds:

There are plenty of areas in America where Christianity is not the dominant faith and if [the idea that Christianity may not be the faith of the majority] then Christians would be screaming about the unfairness of the practice. I also think it is hypocritical for Christians to maintain we are a Christian nation and then speak or act in ways that are very un-Christ-like. I think that undermines the Christian faith as well. So when I teach government, my students understand there is a reason why there is a separation of church and state because we allow all faiths to

have equity and not just grant one religion more favor over the other (Personal Writing, Nanci).

She reminds her students that when they state we should have prayer in schools, they are amiss. In other words, they only think that because they are in the majority. If they were not, as in the case of Detroit, Michigan, where the Muslim population is large in number, would you want to be forced to listen to the Quran? This teacher seeks to add complexity when discussing with students and as a result, “Holocaust education and other topics, if handled appropriately, broadens your mind. This little bubble you live in will be destroyed because there are people who are different from you... expect it” (Interview with Nanci). As a history teacher, she sees danger in entwining politics with religion. Candidates say they have a certain religious belief, but they do not emulate what the religion is really about. Others, who are not of that religion, see the falsity of the claim and “it’s contradictory,” which looks like a lie. This “politicization of religion” is dangerous because then some will make the leap to say, “God has chosen this person” and this is a dangerous road that we are on (Interview with Nanci).

Parallels can be seen with what transpired with the Nazi party and their declaration of their rightness through their rhetoric and the sponsorship from the Catholic Church, which supported vilifying the Jews. When people supported the oppressed Jews they were seen as criminals. “We forget about people like German Pastor Niemöller, who singularly had to stand up for and oppose the general thinking,” of who was right and although they were Christians, they were persecuted as being wrong because they did not accept the popular belief of rightness (Interview with Nanci). In the case of Niemöller, he was imprisoned in two concentration camps before being released at the end of the WWII. Jews were labeled to be “Christ killers” by the church, but in actuality it was the reigning government of the time, the Roman Empire, which

crucified Christ. Without education, we will “gloss over that part” to become a nation in which “we seek affirmation instead of information” (Interview with Nanci). We want to just hear and listen to that which we already agree. “If we don’t agree with it, it becomes fake news” (Interview with Nanci). During the Nazi years, Christianity in general was seen as complicit to the Nazi agenda. Those who stood against Nazism, despite their personal religious beliefs, were seen as the enemy by the mainstream Nazi regime.

For this reason, we must teach children to be thinkers. With regard to 24-hour news stations and propaganda, she says her students are bombarded by sensational news and this can harden them to the fact that real, individual people are experiencing these horrific life events. “Holocaust education, to me, is a way to pay respect, and I guess, give the people who were persecuted or tortured that their lives were not lost in vain. Hopefully “this lesson is one for perpetuity, to again never let that happen” (Interview with Nanci). But, we know that “human beings were the same as they are now and will be in the future. So, behaviors that are learned and not refined will cause things like that to happen again. So, we each must be individually responsible to do what we can at all moments of [our] lives” (Interview with Nanci). She goes on to explain, “Holocaust education can serve as a great method and tool to show the great depravities that human beings are capable of, but also the great amount of good that people are capable of” (Interview with Nanci).

“I’ve been teaching for a long time and what I always learn is I know less than I think I do, every day. I learn something every day. That has to be my [your] motto” (Interview with Nanci). As we begin our final interview, Nanci has just come back from a training session on an area of advanced placement history (not in Holocaust education), and her overarching theme is that she wants to teach what she had been teaching, albeit with greater refinement. She is



disappointed that she may have been missing some vital points in the subject matter she has taught for several years. She feels awful. But, after a while she decides she must recalibrate her teaching and her thinking about the subject. She is willing to accept the trainer's criticism that she was not pushing her students enough, and her interpretation of written tasks needed further development. She also needed to do some processing of the data based on questions she was asking students to analyze. At first, she was dismayed, and then "convicted," then challenged, and then willing. The teacher's practice of internalizing content first and then helping students to unpack and invest themselves is a method they do together and this disposition she models for her students: Be thinkers. Because she studies and understands deep learning, the nuances of human interaction, and the oft subtlety of text, she challenges her students to incorporate themselves. This is significant, especially in the case of Holocaust education. Instead of dismissing and simplifying complexity, she herself is willing to incorporate and learn in such a way that her students do not dismiss their connection with this part of history, and this history involves human beings. Their connection not only involves an understanding of history, but also how their choices affect their future and perhaps, the future of others.

## CHAPTER V

### RETELLING STORIES PART II

This chapter is the second part of the data findings, begun in chapter four. For the reason for the divisions you can refer to the introduction of chapter four. Similar to the preceding chapter, to begin retelling their stories, I have included a specific quote shared by each teacher.

#### *Carman's Story: "I Am Hungry to Know"*

*That's the difficulty in these times: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to meet the horrible truth and be crushed by grim reality. It's really a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals; they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet, I cling to them, because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart (Anne Frank, 1991, p.332).*

Carman sits down carrying a huge purse and after greeting each other, we begin to talk. She reveals she was born in the city in which she resides. She is an only child and her mother "always worked" to support them because her father, whom she calls "Daddy," did not live with them after he and her mother divorced. She tells me she recognizes her mother's progressiveness working professionally outside the home during the 1960s, compared to many women who did not, but were the primary care giver to their offspring and worked in the home. As a result of her

mother's employment, Carman was raised by a large extended family that included her "maternal grandmother, aunts, and caregivers" (Interview with Carman).

As a child, she remembers that she loved school and books, and she was reading before she started kindergarten. She recalls some of her favorites were *Nancy Drew* books, the *Boxcar Children* series and *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. From early on, she "loved her teachers and received affirmation from them" (Interview with Carman). She describes herself as a good student, who "liked to sing and was always in the choir." She says she loved "attending church and sees God as her hero and rescuer. I trusted and depended on him to save me," she said (Interview with Carman). However, not everyone in her life seemed as trustworthy.

### **Thinking Differently About Dad and Daddy**

Carman calls her biological father "Daddy" and says she loved her stepfather, whom she called "Dad," but she never felt like she could replace her biological father. Because she refers to each man by a different title, she ensures that I understand the difference. Carman explains she and Daddy were never close and that he was never involved in her life after he left the family. She did not know if there were reasons for this relationship void. A trip to an amusement park and a birthday at which Daddy was present are "snapshot type memories" that she has. When he died around 2008, with that went the chance for closeness to her biological father. She says she always wished for reconciliation with her biological father, but there never was one. And yet, Carman talks of her "strong cultivated sense of loyalty and what's appropriate." For example, she remarked that when Daddy remarried, he insisted that she call the new woman by the title, Mother. Carman shakes her head while she tells me how difficult this was for her. After all, this new woman was not her mother. So, when her mother married her husband, Ben, Carman would not call him daddy but chose to address him as dad. "That worked for me," she said (Interview

with Carman). “I loved my dad”, she explains as she continues with more on him (Answers to writing prompt, Carman).

“Dad was an honorable man. He was a World War II veteran and veteran of the Korean conflict” (Interview with Carman). Her dad was a pilot and then went to university and studied mechanical engineering. At first, it was very easy for Carman to accept her new dad (pseudonym-Ben). She says, “He was classy, and a gentleman.” She found him interesting and someone she could admire. He and her mother were very strict in raising her. She never broke curfew and did not get to go out with friends; it was a “very sheltered social life” (Interview with Carman). When she went to a college that had a curfew, the curfew was less strict than the one imposed by her parents. If she were late, they would reduce her curfew time by 30 minutes. She remembers being in junior high school and wanting to attend one of the special school dances, but her parents said she could not and that was how it was for her. Yet and still, Carman felt close to her dad, now gone since 2005.

On the morning of his death, Carman and her mother were sitting in her mother’s home in the kitchen and Carman asked if she could have something that belonged to Ben to carry with her. In his bedroom, Carman found a compass Ben had stored in the top drawer of his bureau. She said she carried the compass with her for years in her purse. When she had a difficult task to accomplish, she retrieved the compass and held it in her hand. “It was just a connection with my dad” (Interview with Carman). “I wanted to be a better person because I represented him,” she said (Interview with Carman).

She recounts a story and interprets that she became the person she is today because of his parenting. One of the rules she had to abide by when she was a high school student was driving the car. She could drive to school, but had to return directly home once the school day ended.

But, one day after school, she wanted to see her boyfriend who attended a different school. Since boys were not allowed at her house, she went to his house. She says she regularly did this, despite the rule on driving directly home. On one particular day, her father came home and questioned her about where she had been. She lied, telling him, “Yes, I’m here. I’ve been here doing homework.” He beckoned her to follow him to the garage where he “made me put my hand down on the hood of the car with the engine still hot” (Interview with Carman). She was careful to say he took her by the wrist, but he “didn’t drag me or anything. I walked with him” (Interview with Carman). There was no further punishment or outcome from this interchange, which she calls “generous” because he could be very harsh (Interview with Carman).

### **“My Dad Wanted to Protect Me”**

Carman is tall and indicates she was athletic and enjoyed playing basketball, but said, “My parents never allowed me to participate in sports” because in their minds, academics came before anything else. And as a result she felt she “was sheltered from many things in every day life” (Answers to writing prompt, Carman). She said some of the protection she felt ended up being overprotection and kept her very naïve, even as an adult. She stated her dad wanted to save her from things, but protection is something she could not explain and she remained dubious concerning exactly how she interprets this protection. She is conflicted when she talks about his motives, stating that perhaps he was concerned about disappointing her mother and therefore, he was strict with her to keep her from bad behaviors so he would not disappoint her mother as head of the household.

Carman says her mother was her hero in that she was a “single mom for nine years and she and I developed a very close relationship that we still have today.” Apparently, her mother and biological father “fought and although he wasn’t abusive, he was physical and aggressive and he

had a big personality” (Interview with Carman). This seems like a contradiction, which Carman does not explain. Perhaps this is the story she has relied on that was formed from her mother’s reality when Carman was a young child and this reality is what she uses to fill in this part of her story. She explains her biological father in the following way:

He was in sales. He charmed my mother. I sometimes wondered more how they ever got together, more than I wondered how they didn’t stay together. I think it was his charm. He was handsome and he was a big talker. I think he was very successful in business and in selling, so I think he just caught my mom at a vulnerable time. She grew up in a Pentecostal Holiness family. My daddy was about as far away from that. I don’t know if it was part rebellion on my mother’s part (Interview with Carman).

As Carman developed in awareness, she began to compare herself with her junior high school peers; seeing disparities in dress and possessions and realizing that she and her mother were struggling financially. In the time period prior to the marriage of her mother and Ben, she said she began to “struggle socially” (Interview with Carman). Despite the struggle, she made friends with Jewish classmates who were children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. She found herself “loving these people because she had been taught deep love and respect for the Jewish people in her church and through her spiritually upbringing” (Interview with Carman). As a result of many friendships, she attended Bar and Bat Mitzvahs as well as confirmations in Christian orthodox settings (i.e., Catholic and Episcopal churches).

### **Early Adulthood**

Studying French in junior high school and then German in high school, Carman realized her love for different cultures. She says that she “studied French as a junior and senior in high

school and was drawn to study languages and cultures. [I] had an early understanding and desire to communicate with others in both directions” (Answers to writing prompt, Carman). She explains that she did not just want to teach English; she wanted to learn from others. When she entered college at age 16, she enrolled in English literature classes, thinking by age 25 she would be an English professor. She had a strong interest in Indo-European languages and wanted to master Romance languages. This desire was partly fulfilled when she met her husband in the university’s language lab, where he was working as a Russian language foreign language assistant. She thought it was unusual for anyone to study Russian during the Cold War era of the 1970s and 1980s. The attraction led to marriage, and the couple relocated after graduation.

Carman and her husband desired to be Christian missionaries to Russia. By 1976, the newly married couple moved to the Chicago suburbs where Carman finished her bachelor’s degree. At that time, she was disillusioned with teaching (in the public school) and its requirements, but continued to work by tutoring Russian Jewish refugees in Chicago and assisting them in bettering their English. The Orthodox organization they were affiliated with were somewhat opposed to the couple’s work because they were only to evangelize; however, Carman states they continued to focus on literacy, because this helped her pupils lead better lives.

One story she mentions is of a mother and son who Carman and her husband tutored. She knew these people were scientists in Russia, but because they had no English language usage, they did menial work in the U.S. just to survive. It took a while to develop trust with these people, but after time investment, the mother and son improved their English and improved their job opportunities. The improvement of their lives indicated education was working. “Commitment takes time,” Carman said. For 18 months to help the two Russians better function in everyday life, Carman and her husband drove to the opposite side of town to help them learn English. She

says this type of consistency is needed of any type of commitment, whether it is to her students or to teaching about the Holocaust: Things take time and do not happen all at once.

### **Moving Back from Chicago**

In 1986, the couple moved back to the state in which she was born to raise their “brilliant children” and then for 18 years, Carman was a stay-at-home mom (Interview with Carman). As the children grew, she asked herself if this was the time for her to return to teaching. She recalls that the administrator at her daughter’s school was instrumental in getting Carman an interview, which eventually resulted in employment. Finally, the time was right. It coincided with her children leaving for college, and Carman began to teach English, first at a high school and then moved to the junior high school where she presently works.

### **Seeing with Optimism. Finding the Happy Way**

Carman considers herself a positive individual. She recognizes her positive attitude has more to do with the choice to be positive and to be happy and accepting. She says she does not like to be negative for very long and believes in life one “can find the happy way out or the optimistic way out.” She gives herself very little room for other alternatives. She is not “the person who’s going to give up or feel sorry for herself” (Interview with Carman). Despite what others may see as annoyance, she sees as opportunity.

One of her most recent challenges is caring for her 82-year-old mother. “Mom was alone, and I could see her life beginning to change” (Interview with Carman). Her mother has always been strong, independent, and very much in charge. Her mother did not want to acknowledge that life was changing and that she was becoming more frail and dependent on others, and Carman and her husband knew they needed to bring her to live with them. Carman’s husband works out of town several days each week and uses his home office the rest of the time. This



means that Carman and her mother are together the majority of the time. To complicate the situation, Carman also has adult children. One of her children is expecting a second child while facing the possibility of a difficult pregnancy and her husband works out of town. So, in addition to work, Carman also helps care for her granddaughter so her daughter can attend her frequent doctor's appointments. These demands cause Carman to feel like she is part of the "sandwich generation" (Interview with Carman), being pulled in several directions, financially and physically obligated to her family's younger and older generations. Dealing with her mother is not always easy and she explains their relationship in the following way:

She's a very strong, independent person, who still would like to be in charge. She doesn't see her role changing. This is the typical position I think of anyone with a declining parent, and child caregivers who want what's best for their parents. My husband and I know, without a doubt, that this is what is right for her and certainly what is right for our family. We wouldn't do it any other way, but it can be very difficult. Including her thinking that I should still be in by the time it gets dark; that there shouldn't be anything else that I need to do outside of the house (Interview with Carman).

In addition, everywhere she goes, Carman must carry all of her significant data in a large purse, made heavy from its contents (e.g., checkbook, bank statements, sensitive personal correspondence, etc.) because when Carman is at work, her mother "snoops" through Carman's personal items. Carman is used to this intrusion into her private world and states it is part of living with her mother. She speaks about this to inform me, but does not seem to grumble. Carman says these facts are all part of her present life; a life she feels is blessed because she is

able to do things for other family members. She also acknowledges she feels blessed to be able to interview and tell this part of her teacher story, and that part is connected to Holocaust education.

### **Spiritually Open to Holocaust Education**

Carman sees her connection to Holocaust education as spiritual. She says she started her life in a protestant church, but she has long since converted to Roman Catholicism because of her marriage. She needed to convert to Roman Catholicism if she wanted to be married in the church or she would need a special dispensation from the bishop (of the church). Beyond her attachment to the church, she says, “I have always been aware of God. I can’t remember a time in my life when I did not love God” (Interview with Carman). She says she feels blessed she was taken to church at a young age. In spite of a difficult early life, she says she has:

Always trusted the Lord... I just ask God to lead me and to show me what he wants me to do. It then becomes obvious. So then, being in a city where there is a vibrant Jewish community, being involved in church that exposed me to love and honor Jewish people, and to be humbled by their philanthropy and focus on bettering the community, facilitates my feeling and ability to connect with Holocaust education (Interview with Carman).

Perhaps this is why, despite her parent’s overprotection, she has found her way to understand and teach about the Holocaust. Carman recalls she was not allowed to watch the “old Millie Perkins version of the *Diary of Anne Frank*, the first TV movie version,” but she heard her mother watching it. And while listening, Carman began to understand there was a girl named Anne Frank who was a victim. There were unusual haunting sounds (i.e., the warbling tone European law enforcement sirens made compared to U.S. sirens), which caused her to understand there were unknown things about which she desired to know. As she grew physically and mentally,

she became more aware that culture, language, America and people around the world were connected somehow or perhaps through shared experience.

As a young woman, she remembers having opportunities, like hearing Corrie ten Boom speak on campus at the university Carman attended. Carman remembers hearing ten Boom speak about loving the Jewish people and of her and her family's sacrifice to keep them safe from peril. Then, she recalls the life of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who could have many times returned home, but instead saved thousands of Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian government collaborated with the Nazis; however, as WWII progressed and suffering worsened, a desperate Hungary sought peace with the Allies. Nazi Germany reasserted its power and occupied Hungary, demanding that all Hungarian Jews be deported. About 440,000 people were deported and 320,000 were immediately killed.

It was during this time that Wallenberg was sent to help in diplomatic relations. He risked his life to assist with diplomatic intervention, saving as many of the remaining Jewish population and get them out of Hungary – about 100,000 people. During this time, Wallenberg disappeared and was never seen again. Carman is deeply touched by the lives of such people. She says, “These people could have said, ‘it’s not my business’ and they would have gone back to their homes and been safe. Instead they put their lives on the line” (Interview with Carman). In addition, her own learning and scholarship is significant to her understanding. She says:

Still, even before I taught, one of the last pieces I was reading was Martin’  
Gilbert’s book, *The Holocaust*. I would say that was the most complex single  
piece of writing that I have read. There were times, I was 30 when I read it, and  
there were times when I had to stop reading it for a while. It was devastating.  
When my students have talked about how sad and upset they get when we’re

reading (about the) Holocaust or discussing, I said that's the appropriate response. There is no other response. I would be more worried about you if you weren't devastated, or if you weren't sad or if you weren't angry. That's how you should feel when you read these things. That's how I felt when I read Gilbert's work (Interview with Carman).

She encourages her students when the material emotionally moves them. Carman encourages her students to seek out the difficultness of the subject and not be driven by negative feelings, and she leads by example. Each school year, she brings a "couple of shelves of Holocaust literature...they are not school appropriate," meaning the readability is more difficult than what most of her students can digest, "but I take them because they're part of who I am, and I'm taking myself into that classroom to share with my students" (Interview with Carman). She models her scholarship in that she tells students what she is reading and learning.

Similar to many teachers, *Anne Frank* (1985) was the piece of literature first used to teach the Holocaust. Carman considers Anne Frank part of cultural literacy; it is significant knowledge. Her journey does not stop here. She challenges her students to think by asking, "Why is it important for people to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*?" She says she helps students understand that millions of people died during WWII, but every single one of them was an Anne Frank to somebody (Interview with Carman); all victims had stories, but Anne's was preserved. Therefore, Carman challenges her students to search for new and different stories of people less well known than Anne Frank and to find relevance in those stories as well. She believes the human connection is essential, and students must be encouraged in their relationships with this subject.

## Teaching Students to Find Relevance and Maintain Humanity

Carman states her goal is “to give human face to the victims” (Interview with Carman). Therefore, one of her pedagogical strategies is to let students understand “the lives the victims led before they became victims, because they are more than their suffering” (Interview with Carman). Then she asks difficult questions that cause students to think. For example, she poses important questions to her students such as, “What can we lose and still be human?” She says as they read *Night* (Wiesel, 1958), she was careful to point out that Elie Wiesel was reflective as a young child. He remembers some of the people he encountered in the camp and their struggle to remain human. It is important learning that students also become reflective, but not judgmental in thinking they are superior to those who have “nearly abdicated their humanity” (Interview with Carman). She poses difficult questions in her teaching: “What would you do for a crust of bread? Would you dive into the middle of a group and clamor for a crust of bread like a wild animal?” (Interview with Carman). Her hope is that students will understand the complexity of the human experience when encountering violent situations in their learning.

When teacher and students dialogue about aspects of the Holocaust they learn together. She learns something new all the time; “it’s still fresh to me” (Interview with Carman). In addition, she feels a deep connection to this history because she knows or knew people who survived. Through her work on the area educational board of her local Jewish federation, she met a survivor who she considers a mentor. This survivor is someone she has known “most closely” and she wants to “honor her life and tell this story for the rest of my life” (Interview with Carman). Carman stated she would tell anyone who would listen. She reminds her students that they are lucky to live in a time where “there are actual eyewitnesses” and those might be Holocaust survivors, grandparents who are WWII veterans. She encourages her students to

connect to this part of history because “it is too big and too powerful and too important not to tell and to convey to the next generation. The responsibility will be greater for them” because first-hand witnesses will have died (Interview with Carman) and future students will not have met eyewitnesses. She remarked that we needed to tell this story because we are human beings and we are caring citizens; we should not feel that “it doesn’t matter to me, personally” (Interview with Carman).

### **Learning and Pedagogy**

Holocaust education is a difficult area, mainly because “of the horror of it.” She added, “the magnitude of the Holocaust is difficult to wrap your brain around; it is difficult to absorb and words cannot [fully] describe” this event and the human experience engulfed within (Interview with Carman). She stated that her understanding the subject well enough to teach about the Shoah is the “best way I deal with the difficulty of teaching it” because this exposes students to the difficulty and complexity of the topic. The Holocaust or the Shoah is history that influences “generations and the world.” She confirms that she feels satisfaction by telling individual stories, so that “it’s not just a big mass. One of the difficulties is to personalize experience and suffering; to not let six million remain a number.”

One of Carman’s favorite activities to do with students is the backpack, a very familiar activity that relies on students’ imagination. The teacher ties the activity to the last scene in the *Anne Frank* play, in which Anne has “only a few minutes to pack a bag” (Interview with Carman). It can remain simplistic or be a tool that students use to think. Students look at an outline of a backpack and then decide, “In five minutes, what will I pack in that backpack?” They begin with a list of at least 10 items. Some students want to take their best friend, but since that person will not fit into the backpack, they are not allowed. Carman states her students also

realize that taking their iPhone and charger will be problematic since having an electricity source may be an issue.

### Teaching without Sensationalism

Carman realized early in her career that teaching the Holocaust from an emotional, sensationalized place was not helpful or healthy for students. Carman said, “Ginning-up our feelings so we can all feel really bad about it, but nothing happens after that” is something she avoids...I think it’s wrong to do that” (Interview with Carman). She wants her students to understand these are real stories about real people and then to respect these stories. Authentic storytelling and using confirmed historical information can be rich, difficult, and challenging, but if sensationalism is the end-goal of education, then this is “a huge disservice to students and myself” (Interview with Carman). In keeping with the idea of an authentic, non-sensationalized approach, Carman does not believe in any kind of simulation. Instead, she builds background knowledge with her students, grounding stories to actual historical dates, laws, and occurrences. In the case of Anne Frank, she uses a timeline, so students understand that Anne’s father, Otto Frank, moved the family from Germany to Amsterdam around 1933. The family went into hiding in 1942 because there was nowhere else to run.

Carman stated that she knows students grow in their ability to relate and empathize. For example, when students move on to other pieces of literature and stories, she sees “them express their anger when one of the characters is mistreated” or *othered* in some way. She also told me she was surprised at how these same students easily forget the lessons of compassion learned from Holocaust studies. She stated that one of her classes “bullied a substitute to tears” (Interview with Carman). The substitute has a disability and apparently, the school administration was called to her room and students were made to stop the harassment. When she

returned to class she talked with her class about their actions and reminded them of the need to be mindful that they are not being a bystander or participating in bullying.

“Students are not as curious as they were five years ago,” Carman said. She expresses her concern to parents and colleagues that “curiosity is what drives us forward” and wants to continue to cultivate this in students (Interview with Carman). She holds her hands to make a circle and says, “Imagine this is everything I know. Everything out here (she motions to space outside the circle made by her hands), I am hungry to know” (Interview with Carman). She indicates that she recognizes some students have privilege and feel they already know enough, not needing to learn any more about this part of history, but they are not the norm, and therefore, Holocaust education must continue to challenge student’s thinking and understanding.

#### **Morgan’s Story: “Teachers are the Conservators of the Past”**

*Well, first the operator said, "Mr. Farmer?" and I said, "Yes," and she said, "Long distance call." And I said, "Who's calling, operator?" I was very tired. We'd just gotten back home. And she said, "The President." And, I was about to say "The president of what?" when Mr. Johnson came on the phone. And he said, "Mr. Farmer, I just wanted to touch base with you, and I remember very well when we had that long talk when you were down in my office when I was Vice President, and Chairman of the President's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity. We asked for your help then and we got it. And we're going to need your help in the months that lie ahead. And, I want you to know that, and I hope that we can count on you to help us. And I'd like to talk with you, so next time you are in Washington drop by to see me. "Well, I had no idea what 'Drop by to see me,' means when the President of the United States calls! So I asked a politician*



*friend of mine, 'What does it mean when the President of the United States says drop by to see me?'" He said, "The President of the United States doesn't say drop by and see me!" And I said, "Well, he just did!" "Well then he means," said this party, "get in touch with his appointment secretary as soon as possible and set up an early appointment," which I did. I saw him, then, in the White House on December 6, of 1966 (James Famer, Civil Right Leader, Oral History interviews from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library).*

Morgan, a man in his early 60s, was born in a large city in a U.S. Midwest state. He describes himself as an average student in math, but one who loved social studies and excelled in learning about history, geography, and civics. For two decades he has been teaching in the city in which he lives. Morgan recalls his parents were loving, but stoic. They did share with him that his father was a carpetbagger who also served in the U.S. Air Force as a military policeman and was part of a unit that aided the French resistance during WWII.

### **Parents of the WWII Era**

Morgan's father was a crewman on a B-24 Liberator strategic air-to-ground bomber that was shot down while on a mission. He was captured by the German military and became an American prisoner of war (POW). His mother worked for the war effort at U.S. Air Force Plant No. 3, operated by the Douglas Aircraft Co., which ironically, was responsible for producing the B-24 her father crewed on missions against the Axis forces. His parents wrote each other while separated by the war and kept all of their correspondence. He states:

Little did they know, they were going to later have a history teacher son and they kept all their correspondence and telegrams and just an archive of all those things.

It's just very impressive. I had the special connection to focusing on World War II with my students (Interview with Morgan).

Because his letters were censored, due to his POW status, his father mentioned his love for his mother by writing about poignant love stories that are well known in literature. For example, he would mention the characters of "*Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff and Cathy" (Interview with Morgan) as a way to communicate his love for Morgan's mother, without directly stating words that could be censored. Morgan states reading his parent's letters created tender feelings he still feels toward them and their experiences. He supposes that this was somehow passed to him and is why he continues to be drawn to words and stories as a way to relate to others. Later and decades after WWII, a local TV station filmed an interview with Morgan's father and when asked about the reunification of Germany, Morgan recalls his father said:

It was a good thing for the Americans and the Germans to have Germany reunited and for the Cold War to have ended. It was just almost like a benevolent, very tolerant statement that I think that...we, I don't know how typical it was of a lot of veterans but I don't think it was probably very typical. I think it was just an expression of what kind of person he was, that he didn't really just believe in this animosity. (Interview with Morgan)

Morgan's father was very open and tolerant and had no bitterness toward Germany despite being an American POW.

### **Spiritual Connections**

Morgan considers himself a Biblical scholar and draws on the story of radical conversion of Paul. It was as if he were "struck by this thunderclap, by lightening. He does this life-changing

thing” (Interview with Morgan). The following stories are examples Morgan gives of his experiences that express life-changing surprising experiences.

Morgan went to junior high and high school during the time of the Civil Rights movement. He describes that historical time as one of intense and overt racism. His own teachers would say things in this way:

Even some of my teachers would say things in class that were just horribly beyond the pale racist. I particularly remember one shop teacher. Somebody asked him about what did the NAACP stand for. He said, ‘Niggers, alligators, apes, coons and pigs.’ That was when I was in the seventh grade. That is seared in my mind (Interview with Morgan).

He said he knew this response wasn’t right; however, the school and local community accepted an answer like that. So, he pushed down the urge to say, “Hey, you shouldn’t say things like that” (Interview with Morgan). It was acceptable to agree or to say nothing at all. His hometown was very racist and it was OK for people to remain so. For Morgan, this was about to change.

### **Hearing James Farmer Speak**

When Morgan was in junior high school, his best friend at that time invited him to attend a lecture at the city’s downtown library. This friend was apparently failing a class and the teacher offered extra credit points for attending this lecture. As they walked into the auditorium well before the event started, they sat in the front row and heard others enter the darkened room. Soon, Civil Rights author and leader, James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality began to speak:

He spoke for a considerable amount of time, gave an extremely powerful direct, penetrating speech on the history of racism towards African Americans. I felt the whole time that he was looking right at me because we were right there in front of

the podium. He just went into the whole history of oppression and racism and it was just incredibly powerful. After the speech was over, the crowd just spontaneously arose giving him a standing ovation. My friend, John, and I turned around and looked and we were the only two white people in the whole room.

That just was really a powerful moment (Interview with Morgan).

Growing up in the hostile, racist climate of the 1950s and 1960s, it seems that all the students in his all-white high school were racists. Morgan says this day, with Farmer, changed his feelings and created a new awareness of the other. After hearing Farmer speak about the history of racism in the United States, Morgan says, “It was as if those prejudice scales had dropped from our eyes, and neither of us would ever tolerate any racist words or behavior in our presence” (Interview with Morgan). To this day, he treasures Farmer’s book, *“Freedom, When?”*

Morgan states this event shaped his worldview to one that values the experiences of others. He sees “how racism and anti-Semitism are deadly ‘cancers, which destroy lives’” (Interview with Morgan). Each year, he tells the above story to students to emphasize that they must be open to meeting people who will change their outlook, much like how Farmer changed his. He says he spoke out when classmates used racial epithets. After high school, he went to a local community college and then transferred to a well-known university in the state in which he currently lives and majored in political science. He worked for electoral and ballot petition campaigns of third party/Independent candidates throughout the country. After serving as a national ballot drive coordinator in the 1984 Libertarian party presidential campaign, he became a public school teacher and has taught for more than 25 years.

## **“I Was the Only Man in the Room”**

As a young man, he happened to see an advertisement in the local newspaper about a new bookstore beginning business in his hometown. He explains:

I was paying for [items] at the cash register, the lady behind the counter at the cash register said, ‘Hey on Wednesday night, we’re having a little thing here, a little gathering, some light refreshments, some entertainment. Why don’t you come down?’ I thought, “Well, OK, maybe I’ll consider it.” Well, Wednesday rolled around and I wasn’t really doing anything. There wasn’t anything great on TV or I didn’t have any particular place I wanted to go. I thought, “Hey, maybe I’ll go down to the bookstore and just check out what she was talking about.” I got down there – there was something like a two dollar cover charge to help pay for the refreshments. Before long, the entertainment began and it was a couple folk singers. They were very quite good with guitars. They were playing a number of songs and eventually, they were playing an old Simon and Garfunkel song (Interview with Morgan).

He says he realized at that moment he was the only male in that room. He realized what it might be like to be the other; having had these two experiences showed him he was in a situation where he was not in the majority. He became more aware of how he felt about being different.

## **Marriage and Fate**

Morgan has been married twice. His first wife died around 1996, but the unusual way he met his second wife bears retelling. His first wife was a psychiatric nurse that suffered a broken back after being violently attacked by an out-of-control patient. The damage done to her body caused other issues, which resulted in her suffering “chronic pain” (Interview with Morgan).

While reading about a chronic pain support group, she decided to start one of these groups in the city in which they lived, to support others who suffered constant physical pain. The group, affiliated with the American Chronic Pain Association, eventually broke away to develop their own independent pain support group. It was a center for information, locating doctors, housing and even employment for those whose lives were challenged by never-ending pain. She became a “one-person resource service” (Interview with Morgan). One day, his wife took too much medication and died. It is unclear whether this was suicide, but Morgan thinks her overdosing was unintentional.

One of the former members of the pain support group had not received news of the death, and by this time, at least a year had passed. A mutual acquaintance told the former member that Morgan’s wife had died and she immediately called Morgan, left a message to offer condolences, and to ask about his wellbeing. Morgan returned her call, and in the process of their conversation, they agreed to meet. “Hey, let’s get together and go to a couple garage sales,” he stated that was how the initial meeting began. They did; they returned to his house; she “never left; and we were together until she died” (Interview with Morgan).

After the two married, Morgan’s second wife revealed a dream she had. In her dream, Morgan’s first wife told her to get in touch with Morgan. At first she resisted the suggestion, but after a while, she felt compelled to. Nevertheless, as it were, a “bizarre parallel connection” occurred (Interview with Morgan). Unfortunately, and ironically, the second wife also dealt with pain issues and died in much the same way as Morgan’s first wife. However, the second wife had a daughter who had a 1-year-old son, and prior to his second wife’s death, they moved into Morgan’s house. After his wife died, they continued to live with Morgan for a couple of years and still look after him, still living very near him to this day. Morgan jokingly states that he

would be “a good Hindu because [he] has become rather fatalistic” and believes that “some people will die at different times and there isn’t much you can do about it” (Interview with Morgan). Time is precious and you have to “treasure the time you spend with [people you care about]” (Interview with Morgan).

Morgan conveys that people do not process the same way, meaning that “others don’t see things sometimes the way [I] do” and this “quality has made me a better teacher over the years.” He recognizes that accepting life is a process; much like “education is a process” (Interview with Morgan), and this has shaped him as a person and as a teacher and learner.

### **“Claiming Ignorance is no Excuse”**

Morgan’s commitment to learning history is a significant part of his professional life. He understands that history is important to understanding the experience of people. Claiming ignorance is inexcusable, just like the unjustifiable inaction of many German townspeople who claimed, “they didn’t know it was happening” (Interview with Morgan) when confronted with their ignoring or complicit actions of refusing to believe that their Jewish neighbors were disappearing. “Didn’t you realize that your neighbors were disappearing over the years?” Did they see virulent propaganda like *The Eternal Jew* [movie] and put two and two together to realize what was happening to the Jews? “Did they see the smoke forming from Hadamar hospital (Hadamar, Germany), where children were being executed?” (Interview with Morgan). Morgan confirms that he thinks his students also have no excuses because his teaching has changed their level of understanding, but he does not fully explain how to inform his answer by using examples of student learning.

Morgan says that his learning has increased his content knowledge and strengthened his ability to write about historical issues. He writes blogs, and reviews movies and films for various

websites. Most of these reviews are of films he shows in class. In addition, he writes about governmental issues and makes historical connections such as the “Impact of WWII, the Holocaust and the Middle East. The impact of the Holocaust is continuing” (Interview with Morgan). The Ba’ath Party in Syria or in Iraq was modeled after the Nazi Party. Modern times bear the weight of prejudice and violence that led to WWII and that continues through the ages. This teacher sees that history is not “wrapped up, pretty, sweetness and light” and this knowing has “shaped [me] him” (Interview with Morgan).

### **Cognitive and Emotional Understanding, Not by the Book**

To teach Holocaust education, one must connect both “cognitively and emotionally” (Interview with Morgan). Understanding history is imperative for understanding people and “how to reason and logically understand problem solving” (Interview with Morgan). Understanding that history starts with his choice to teach the history of WWI by showing students about 25-30 carefully curated films on what Nazis believe, Nazi ideology and other facets of WWII to provide the backstory and prepare students to learn about the Holocaust. Students should understand “why the Holocaust in many ways uniquely happened in Germany because Germany was probably the most educated, literature, and culturally developed country in Europe. The high amounts of technology and engineering primed Germany to “create death camps, furnaces, gas chambers, and Zyklon B (Interview with Morgan). Students must see that Germany was the home to “Goethe and Beethoven” and also the site of mass destruction (Interview with Morgan). Morgan shows the film, *Memory of the Camps*, and this is the only film to which students have to write their emotional response. The film is a documentary of the liberation of Nazi concentration and death camps in 1945 by British, American, and Soviet



forces” (Interview with Morgan). Morgan conveys that students are very quiet during this viewing, and he is unsure as to why they are so quiet year after year, film after film.

### **Not All Students Connect with the Subject**

One student in particular was expressly disrespectful during viewing this film. “Hey, look at the tits!” he said. Morgan said he stopped the film and “read him the riot act, took him out of class, and sent him on a discipline referral to the dean of students” (Interview with Morgan). He was suspended and later returned with a poorly worded apology letter that said, “he wasn’t interested in this” (Interview with Morgan). “I never had another problem with that student” (Interview with Morgan). Morgan is not sure of the real status of this student and whether he later became more empathetic. There was no more interaction concerning this student and he would not discuss any more of this incident. I acknowledge that some or part of his answers may be gender-related, which is beyond the scope of this study and could be focused upon in a future study.

Other students express shock and are confused by how “this is so sad and how can this happen? How could people treat other people like this? Why didn’t somebody do something about this?” (Interview with Morgan). Morgan says he “tries to get students to realize a lot of kids just look at history from a textbook,” however, they need to “see how events in the past affect other events that are more contemporary.” Morgan believes that teachers are instrumental to learning by stating the following:

Teachers are the conservators of the past and the truth of the past, as near as we can determine what made up that past, and specifically learning from the past, not only so events like that won’t happen again but to understand why they did happen in the first place and the ongoing relevance of these horrendous events,

because if we don't learn from history, it's mostly a useless exercise (Interview with Morgan).

Morgan articulates his connection to learning; however, this frequently does not translate to student learning. He neither shares how students learn nor how his teaching has grown over time. When asked about how students give feedback on their learning, the teacher does not address the question, and I address this later in chapter six.

#### Sheldon's Story: "It is Great to See a Student Have an Aha Moment"

*After spending a year writing more than 100,000 words, I have a better idea of what the book is about, and I think it is about the wild beast, which is not an animal, nor a person, but a spirit of evil that exists in all animals, all peoples, all societies. The understanding of what my book is about has helped me answer, at least in my own mind, a question asked thousands of times in America, since the war began: Why should Bosnia matter to those of us fortunate enough not to live there? Here is my answer. Bosnia can teach us about the wild beast, and therefore, about ourselves and our destinies (Peter Maass, Love thy Neighbor – A Story of War, 1997).*

Sheldon grew up in a suburb of Chicago. A teacher in his 60s, he shares a sparse amount despite being asked multiple times about the family of his youth. He chose to describe himself as "not one of those kids that moved around a lot" and his father was a "great guy" born in 1918 and "ended up being vice president of a large athletic sporting goods company" (Interview with Sheldon). His mother was born in Ireland and relocated to the U.S. when she was a 4-year-old

child, retaining close ties to Ireland until World War II when she married Sheldon's father. His parents lost their first child, a girl, before Sheldon was born.

### **Remembering Early Pathways**

Sheldon went to high school near a large Jewish population; nearly "60 percent of his classmates were Jewish" (Interview with Sheldon). A nearby suburb, Skokie, Illinois, was the site of a neo-Nazi march in the 1970s and this event was made into a movie. Sheldon recalled celebrating Jewish holidays with his friends and they in turn would celebrate Christian holidays with his family. He recalls looking forward to Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement) because all the "Jewish kids would be gone from school" and "this other kid and I would get to play for long stretches in the gym, since we were the only two Gentiles in class" (Interview with Sheldon). He remembers a classmate whose father was an Auschwitz survivor with the tattoo on his arm, however, this man did not talk about his experiences.

When it was time for college, Sheldon realized that he loved history and would perhaps pursue teaching in college, however, he became disillusioned when after obtaining his master's degree he worked for a professor who specialized in labor history, and this professor had "no problem using [my] Sheldon's labor for no compensation" (Interview with Sheldon). He returned to work for his former employer and took a 27-year or so detour in another field. After decades of working in human relations for this particular company, he was at a point where he could retire. His wife suggested that he could blend the athletic coaching he was already doing for girls' softball with summers off and teaching. Sheldon started teaching first as a long-term substitute in a local public school. Dissatisfied there, he taught for a year at a local charter school before

finally landing at his present teaching assignment, a local private Christian school, where he teaches today.

Teaching in a private school gives him “room for doing other things” and not just what is required by the state (Interview with Sheldon), which is to say he feels he has curriculum options and can make decisions on what he chooses to teach. When the school did not have enough electives, “we came up with a special Holocaust class and one class for philosophy. The Holocaust class drew well” (Interview with Sheldon). After several years, he and a school official determined they should retain and develop only the Holocaust class and he has taught this elective offering for about 10 years. In addition to this elective class, he teaches AP World History and standard or regular world history, which he calls, “a thankless task” (Interview with Sheldon). He would not explain that statement, but shrugged and seemed disappointed with the students of his class. He did add stories as to his disappointment. He says in the 1960s, young people were ready to mobilize, to act on their conviction. I will now present a part of Sheldon’s story that demonstrates his views of how the 1960s affected him and his view of civil rights and Holocaust education.

Sheldon recalls the importance of the 1960s as fundamental to his understanding of history and Jewish people in this way:

In the time I grew up, in the 1960s, when I was in high school and college one of the things that struck me was the [significance] of the voter registration down south. Remember the incident in the 60s where those college students were carted off and killed? At least two of those students were Jewish. If you think about it a little bit, you can begin to see the understanding. There were a lot of Jewish young people involved in the Civil Rights movement because I think they

understood persecution. They understood denial of rights (Interview with Sheldon).

Perhaps a plausible explanation of Sheldon's frustration is that while Jewish people, he argues, know what it is to be ostracized and persecuted, the majority of the people in the state in which he teaches, including his students, do not understand this type of social dilemma. At the very least this is concerning to him. Due to probable misconceptions due to their own ignorance, he still hopes to someday and somehow enlighten his students to open their minds and broaden their acceptance about people and religion. Sheldon knows that he has done this in his own life with his only daughter.

### **A Daughter Who Understands**

Sheldon's only daughter and her husband work for an international organization and are presently stationed in the Middle East and her present job is to establish dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Sheldon is immensely proud of his daughter and believes that his daughter's openness to living abroad began when they traveled overseas as a family after her high school graduation and "things were never the same afterwards." The following summer, she took a six-week course in Europe and her "views on a lot of things changed through that" (Interview with Sheldon). He states his daughter's attitude and disposition toward others and the "awareness of history, she picked that up from me," (Interview with Sheldon) and states this, without directly saying, it is in direct contrast to the students in his class. His daughter loved history class, just not always her history teachers. In the midst of this story, Sheldon spends some time berating the effectiveness of one such high school history teacher who went on to become a superintendent, "calling him the worst teacher his daughter ever had" (Interview with Sheldon), an opinion shared by both father and daughter. He intimated that despite this teacher's poor

influence, his daughter learned to love history. He continued on with the part of his story that includes his daughter. Through his daughter's work with Muslims, Sheldon is able to use her pictures to teach his students about the Bosnia-Herzegovina war, a war in which Christians sought to exterminate Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) who lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sheldon shares a picture that his daughter took of some of the children she has befriended. Sheldon states that many of his students have an attitude of exclusion, which he describes as, "a good Muslim is a dead one" (Interview with Sheldon). The children in the photograph wear western-type clothing, and have blond hair and blue eyes. In comparison, he asks his students, "What do you notice about these children?" (Interview with Sheldon). He does not tell me what his students think about the photograph; however, he does strongly underscore that his students feel very protective of their way of thinking. He states that at his private school students cannot believe that their own religion could be responsible in any way for the persecution of others. They do not believe that "Christians could actually be involved in a genocide" and Sheldon says he "gets push back from them" (Interview with Sheldon). He resisted explaining to me how he helped his students develop deeper understanding, despite the many ways I attempted to ask him. Missionary work is what the students think Sheldon's daughter is engaged in because in their minds, if an American is overseas, they "must be doing mission work" (Interview with Sheldon). They are shocked when he says she is not. He tells me that his daughter has a "dim view of some missionary efforts over there" because in her mind most Christian groups are about "satisfying their own guilt and are not concerned about the lasting effects of their work" or about sustaining the good parts of the work (Interview of Sheldon).

He contrasted his daughter's viewpoint against the lack in his students. He explained that his students think because they live in the United States, distance of space means they are safe

from “things that don’t affect them” (Interview with Sheldon), like the suffering of the Syrian people, because they live far away and will never interface with Syrian people. Sheldon blames the “bubble over here and that what happens on the other side of the world is not important to most people” (Interview with Sheldon). He says that the 1960s were a time of “revolution with purpose” and he seems to pine for that time. He says little to explain how he gets his students to “be more concerned about something besides what they’re doing Saturday night” (Interview with Sheldon). He proceeded to blame the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as the reason he has more students in his class that do not seem to care about Holocaust education, but wanted the grade in his class to count towards their scholarship eligibility. He does not address that he has awareness that his word or deed had influence upon his students’ growth.

### **Teacher Learning and Disposition**

Sheldon has attended a large amount of training on the Holocaust. When discussing his learning, he answers by listing the trainings he has attended and does so by name. For instance, he states he has attended the Belfer Museum program, which is designed for teachers interested in teaching the Holocaust. It is responsible for his “Judaism 101” that he shares with his Holocaust class every year at the beginning of the course. This helps him set a foundation for students as it relates to anti-Semitism. He has traveled with other professionals to Europe and has seen Auschwitz at least twice. He attended a National Endowment for the Humanities Program and this afforded his traveling to Europe for the first time.

### **The Teacher Travels**

Sheldon stated that traveling to the actual sites of Holocaust significance (i.e., Dachau and Auschwitz) and taking pictures that he can share with students is “valuable... and it is easier to explain how things change over time” (Interview with Sheldon). Then he proceeded to inform

me of how the physical structure of Auschwitz has changed. He explained, “I can relate to photos.” When I asked him why he chose specific places to photograph, he stated, “I just thought it would make it better for teaching... it gives more life to the subject” (Interview with Sheldon). The life he speaks of is how he views the importance of Holocaust education. In this case, pictures show students who cannot be there and adds to their understanding of the physical structures of key places of the Holocaust.

### **The Importance of Holocaust Education**

When asked a direct question about the importance of Holocaust education, Sheldon avoided the question or redirects his remarks to include, “...it’s just a part of history. I think it is an interesting part of history” (Interview with Sheldon). One of “the most interesting things and this is probably because we’re a Christian school, is that I teach the history of anti-Semitism” (Interview with Sheldon). He told me that Martin Luther has two writings, 10-years apart. The first is one in which the Jews are misguided and we should be kind to them. The second, is 10-years later and it is totally opposite, it supports violent anti-Semitism; “Their synagogues and Torah schools should be destroyed” (Interview with Sheldon). His students were surprised in this change, and so he tried to challenge their thinking by asking, “Is there some point in your life where your opinion about something changed?” (Interview with Sheldon). He did not lend me an example of a student reply, and I was left to wonder if he knew about his students’ feedback.

Well-read, Sheldon shared a part of what he is reading now. In addition, he read a quote from a book by Peter Maass [*Love Thy Neighbor*, published in 1997] and the section he shared with his students is about the “beast within” (Artifact, Sheldon). He explained the author is angry and the book is angry. I suspected that Sheldon is in a way angry at the apparent shallowness of his students, however, and perhaps unknowingly, his answers also appeared shallow. He shared



another quote from the same book, telling me that “it’s absolutely fantastic to wind up the course with this quote [because] the thinking kids get it.” Without defining who the thinking kids are or responding to my questions, I was left to wonder who are the non-thinking kids and what happens to their learning? He stated, “You have to remember that this is a Christian school where we have some well-to-do Christians and basically, their solution to everything in the Middle East is just to bomb the crap out of them” (Interview with Sheldon). He said he reminds students that nuclear war is a “zero-sum game” (Interview with Sheldon) and not a good solution.

### **Curriculum Learning and Teaching**

The teacher stated at first his teaching was not organized, but in the 11 years of teaching about the Holocaust, he has changed his teaching to include learning about “propaganda and how people can be swayed” (Interview with Sheldon) through the use of language. He typically uses the video, *One Survivor Remembers About the Life of Gerda Weissman Klein*. He uses excerpts from Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*. He uses a book written by the granddaughter of a survivor he knows personally and then teaches students through listening to her videotaped testimony. He lists *The Merchant of Venice* (Shylock’s speech), and Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* as additional curriculum choices.

Sheldon read a letter from one of his students. In it the student thanked him for “being an inspiration for my love of history” (Interview with Sheldon). The student had decided to start collecting antiques and said that she has received a typewriter from the 1940s for her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. At the time of the interviews, this student was studying history at a well-known university and Sheldon took pride in this letter since this student struggled in school and had a slight physical handicap. The student seemed to understand Holocaust education in a way that seemed to surpass the superficial (i.e., she asked questions and read additional material). The

student had researched the T4 Program – the Nazi’s initial extermination program of the handicapped – and realized that if she were alive during that time, she would likely have been a victim of Nazi persecution. “They would have come for me, wouldn’t they?” (Interview with Sheldon). Sheldon stated that “it is great to see a student have an *aha* moment because the student had made a connection between the past and the future and the lessons are applicable to the future as well.” That means the student had an “epiphany when they see they may be the other” (Interview with Sheldon). As Sheldon speaks about his curriculum, he said he begins his Holocaust class with an activity on stereotypes and prejudices and “basically I just tell them to read the items and write down the first thinking that comes to their minds” (Interview with Sheldon). This activity is part of his yearly routine because it helps to expose students’ stereotypes. Students give answers that are insulting and so Sheldon points out to students “that’s where it starts. Trying to be funny or cute, you keep magnifying this.” In this explanation, he does not directly explain to students that they are responsible for their own choices or that racism begins with verbal abuse. He says, “it goes from being a joke to being the norm” (Interview with Sheldon), leaving students to draw their own conclusions about the relevance and significance of their actions or inactions.

### **Shifts in Teaching**

To take things “slower and consider the maturity level of his students” is one reason Sheldon now takes more time “with the build-up to the Holocaust” (Interview with Sheldon). Sheldon states he now includes more poetry in his teaching. He changes part of the curriculum depending on “what the reaction his students give him to parts of the lessons” (Interview with Sheldon). He says this “sometimes makes students look at themselves” in relation to others (Interview with Sheldon) and he concludes that empathy is key. Sheldon states Holocaust

education is important especially since survivors are dying and he gives an example of an advisory board on which he is a member as “not having any young punks” and this is concerning to him (Interview with Sheldon). He meant that the committee was made up of older more experienced teachers, lacking younger teachers not near retirement. Nevertheless, he says he is committed to teaching about the Holocaust as long as the “school doesn’t find some reason to discontinue the course” (Interview with Sheldon). Despite the importance of the subject, he does not think Holocaust education should be “mandated, or [if so] only broadly drawn. The more specific you get, the [more] restrictive you get. It’s not necessarily a good thing” (Interview with Sheldon). Yet, some of his word choices, as mentioned throughout this narrative are confusing to me due to his use of negatively connoted words. Because of these words throughout his narrative, it appeared the teacher is engaged deeply with the concept and history, but less so with how this deepness is translated into student understanding and engagement. I did not ask about his deeper meaning when the words were spoken and I should and could have. This is a partial weakness of this study that I will address in the analysis chapter of this dissertation.

This teacher’s travel experience informed his teaching and his curriculum development, yet it is difficult to determine how his students were affected by his teaching on the Holocaust or how their supposed sense of empathy had been developed. The teacher distanced himself from his students because he did not identify with their type of Christian posturing, yet he values Holocaust education as a way to build sympathy within his students. Because of his commitment as evidenced through the number of years he has taught students about the Holocaust, he has not given up. He was not complacent to the lack of student engagement, but rather unaware of how to pursue it further. This lack of interconnection may create a condition where their othering goes unchecked even though he desires to help students expose their own beast within. I acknowledge

that some or part of his answers may be gender-related and beyond the scope of this study; and therefore, should be considered in a future study.

### Monica's Story: I Want My Students to be Thinking People

*Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*

George Santayana (1863-1952)

Monica was in her early 60s with pale blue eyes and short trimmed hair at the time of the interviews. She sat upright in her chair and began to answer my questions, first just giving me exact, clipped answers to my questions. She had taught for about 22 years in a high school in the city in which she lives. She began by first telling of the extended branches of her family tree. Born in Marietta, Georgia, the family moved when she was 8 years old because her father was transferred to New York City, New York. Her parents still live there and she makes frequent visits to see them. Monica's grandfather was an English professor, who later went into advertising and her grandmother was born in France. The extended side of this part of her family continues living in Georgia. Monica's mother is also from Georgia and met her father there before moving to New York. Monica's mother went to school and became a lawyer in the 1970s, and practiced for a while on the defense side of medical malpractice cases. She said this was a brave move for women and is impressed by her mother's forward thinking (Answers to writing prompt, Monica).

Learning and academics were part of her life and helped her maintain her continued love of learning. Adding to the interesting part of her childhood, she remembered visiting Civil War battlefields in Georgia while on childhood trips from New York to visit relatives. These visits, and his father's love of history, are responsible for her love of history. Monica, one of three children, has an older sister who is an attorney and a younger brother who is a banker. When

Monica was in college, she was very interested in South African history. Thus, she attended a university and sought to specialize in sub-Saharan African history because of its cultural and historical parallels to the U.S. Civil War via South Africa's "segregation, or Apartheid" (Interview with Monica). A history professor at this university sparked her desire to study history even more and she completed her undergraduate degree. She says, "I would have gone into teaching right away," but the combination of finding that there was a "glut" of too many history teachers and herself needing employment, caused her to attend and graduate from law school instead. She married, and began practicing law (Personal Writing, Monica).

### **Travel Fulfills a Desire to Learn and Leads to her Career Choice**

While still in college, she traveled to Europe on her own at age 19 and made a point to visit Dachau concentration camp. She remembers being very interested in anti-Semitism and made it a point of study, writing a paper on anti-Semitism and the Nazi party. She thinks her father was disturbed by the racial injustice he witnessed as a young man and her mother was passionate about struggling against anti-Semitism. But, in our interview Monica could not expound further on any connections, neither how she knew this about each of her parents, nor how her parent's understanding affected her own. She remembered that in high school students were scheduled to watch a Holocaust documentary for a class, but school officials cancelled the showing. She says this was "cowardly" on the administrators' behalf, because they thought the subject was too controversial (Interview with Monica).

Monica practiced medical malpractice law for 15 years and thought she might enter into child advocacy work, but "that's actually a hard area to get into" (Interview with Monica). When asked why she switched from law to teaching, she says laughingly, "Well, I wasn't that good a lawyer" (Interview with Monica). While in law school, she met and married her husband, who is

also an educator. The couple has two adult children and a grandchild. She feels deeply connected to her grandchild and will get in the car and drive herself several states away to visit the baby. This reminded me of her bravery to travel independently; she uses this same ability to remain connected to family.

Presently, Monica teaches three AP courses at a local high school: U.S. History, Comparative Government, and Government and Politics. She reveals that AP Comparative Government is a specialized area and there are fewer students taking this class compared to other AP courses. She says “it is impossible to teach U.S. History without teaching about the Holocaust” (Answers to writing prompt, Monica). She has attended multiple trainings in specialized areas of teaching history (i.e., AP Comparative History) and one dedicated exclusively to teaching about the Shoah. Additionally, she gains much from her husband’s scholarship because he is a history professor at a local private university and is also Jewish. In her Comparative Government class, she said she teaches students to see and understand ideological connections between concepts such as “globalization” and *cleavages*. Cleavages are “ethnic, gender, socio-economic separations within human dynamics that make us less likely to feel connected” (Interview with Monica). The Holocaust is the epitome of the “example of weakness in human nature, one in which [we see] people’s tendency to be manipulated and become a mob.” In the Shoah, once this happened, it was difficult to stop. “The Holocaust is a study in power” and students can understand this, albeit at a micro level (Interview with Monica). She gave the example of cliques in the school cafeteria and asked the question, “What keeps the powerful cliques from spreading their power so that no one else can use the cafeteria?” (Interview with Monica). She posited this question in our interview as important knowledge she

extends to students; however, we do not discuss the avenues for getting students to ponder this question or to answer it for themselves.

### **Historical Complexity Adds Difficulty to Teaching**

Monica said most students are familiar with the Holocaust through studying the novel *Anne Frank*. She said her visit to the Anne Frank House was instrumental in beginning her interests in studying the Holocaust. She does go on to explain that the “subject is enormous” because it is history and people are complex. Realizing this, she helps students begin to grapple by using a printed chronological history of the 1920s and the time leading up to 1933 and “goes over it in class” (Interview with Monica). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is a great resource and she uses the website often. She communicated that it is important for students to understand the complicity of multiple agencies and nations that created the “ultimate historical example of evil and also the potential for good” (Interview with Monica).

### **The Teacher as Learner**

Monica said her learning is continual. During summer breaks she attends as much training as she can, and is especially interested in any sponsored by the National Endowment of the Humanities. She believes these trainings help American history teachers be more prepared because the trainings are of a high quality, but she herself has not attended any training directly on the Holocaust, despite using some lessons from the ushmm.org. She continues a commitment to her own learning in that she is willing to and does consistently travel to various places for training. She said attending and learning at various professional development opportunities has expanded her understanding of the complexity of history and the tangle of the people involved therein. For example, within the Holocaust history one can find examples of “manipulation and power, scapegoating that resulted in violence against a targeted minority, and countries like

Great Britain engaged in appeasement with Germany to avoid war” which only supported the Nazi machine (Interview with Monica). She explained that students ask questions about the bigotry and hatred, “How are people in general capable of this?” (Interview with Monica). When I asked her to explain students’ meaning and possible learning, our conversation circled back to her learning. The teacher used many statements that began with “I suppose” or “I think they can understand,” but then did not or could not expound her key points regarding how this learning affected student learning (Interview with Monica). As the learner, she understood the “accretion of power and the result of that unchecked power” and believes students do as well, however an example of their understanding was not forthcoming.

Monica discussed meeting Holocaust survivor, Robbie Waisman, during a planned Holocaust event at which her students attended. She states she “prepares students and taught Holocaust education for several weeks” prior to the event. She remembers her students traveled from school to the venue by bus and sat in their normal cliques. But, upon returning to school in the bus, students did not migrate to their established groupings and instead sat and discussed the content Waisman delivered during the event. This, the relatively irregular seating choices, seemed unusual to Monica because usually students wanted to sit in regular spots within their clique. But this time, they wanted to sit “up front and talk about what they saw and heard” (Interview with Monica). This indicates student engagement beyond regular social arrangements.

### **No Shifts, Only Surprises**

Monica says that nothing has really changed in her teaching except for the time allotted in which to teach due to excessive mandated testing (i.e., No Child Left Behind). Previous to this, there was more freedom to teach curriculum ideas and because testing mandates were much less so, she could dwell on Holocaust-related subjects within history curriculum for weeks. Sadly, she



says, because of the testing culture, devotion to Holocaust lessons is about three days. More recently the state in which she lives has eased the standardized assessment requirements, and therefore she thinks she will be able to once again devote more time to teaching, a pleasant surprise, she says.

Additionally, Monica is surprised by how much students have to deal within their personal lives, which seem to increase with each passing year. At this point, the teacher's speech becomes more candid and she talks more freely and begins to show a different higher amount of energy not seen in her previous interviews. "It is remarkable" what students endure and she is in "awe of their resilience." She has "tremendous sympathy for students" (Interview with Monica). In some cases, "students are the single breadwinners" for their families. She knows of students who have been abandoned by parents while in their junior year of high school. She asks, "How can parents choose not to have their student succeed or graduate from high school?" (Interview with Monica). She proudly gives me an example of struggle that students face. One student's family testified in a murder trial; this action put all family members at risk. However, they did what they felt morally compelled to do.

Monica wants her students to be "thinking people, who do not lock-step and follow popular thought." Regrettably, she said it is alarming to see a few of her students fascinated by fascism. During the interview, she does not discuss other ways she has been instrumental in dissuading these students of this fascination (Interview with Monica).

### **What is Holocaust Education?**

Monica reiterates the Shoah are specific events and stories of a specific time that "I don't think had happened before, and I don't think it will happen again, I hope, the way it happened." She refers to the uniqueness of this historical event. She tells me a story set in the time of the

Holocaust in which Nazi prison guards victimize a beautiful woman. After a period of being raped by the guards the teacher goes on to explain that the woman has found something sharp and will kill herself later that day, ending her suffering. Monica states that she is pleased to see empathy in his students when they hear this story. From “time to time, a clear indication that they empathize with victims in the sense of, of saying, ‘Well, I would have done that’” is clearly evident of her students’ humanity and ability to identify with the suffering of others.

As a researcher and a teacher, I wonder if the teacher has handled the story of suffering properly, based on what Monica continues saying. One of her students has identified with suicide as an acceptable plan to end one’s suffering. In response to probing questions, Monica informs me that she gives her students enough information and supplies them with “accuracy of the whole political, territorial, ideological control that the Nazis had” and that this student does not face that type of dilemma (Interview with Monica), but my questions have given her pause to consider other possibilities to complex issues discussed later and to be aware of students who valorize suffering or promote suicide. Later, she tells me that she will think more carefully to address any student misconceptions, and that her pausing to respond to questions is a product of having to answer interview questions about her practice.

Monica thinks that her students are “more empowered and have more choices,” which prevent them from falling into despair. Students should understand that their situation is different from a historical point of view, and I would never “want them to think this (the idea of suicide) was a romantic idea in any way” (Interview with Monica). I want them to understand that Holocaust victims “had a different situation, [one] that I hope [nobody] faces in our society” (Interview with Monica). Nevertheless, she is grateful and I think that probing in this area has

opened an area of awareness for her. She seems willing to think she will teach differently in the immediate future.

## CHAPTER VI

### UNDERSTANDING THE THREADS

In chapters four and five, I presented seven stories, and in each I described and utilized the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to retell participants' stories using data from three interviews, participant writings, and artifacts. To “step back and see the stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live” (p. 81) is to examine the field texts and interview transcripts anew.

The Gadamerian hermeneutic framework employed in this research relies on the interpretation of language to determine meaning. In considering the Gadamerian notion of the hermeneutic process, I examined each participant's text in this chapter and analyzed it for themes across participants as they wove together. In addition to all interviews, I ensured that each participant read their written responses, described their artifact and read any written descriptions of their artifact into my audio recorder to ensure all data sources were transcribed.

I uploaded all of this text to *NVivo*, a software program for qualitative data analysis (QSR International NVivo 11 data analysis Software). I reread each transcript and open-coded for themes using the program. In *NVivo*, nodes are *codes* I determined and titled, so I will use the

word *code*. I coded all participant texts, interviews, descriptions, and personal writings using *NVivo*.

As I began to open-code (e.g., labeling concepts, defining and developing categories) the first few interviews, I titled about 70 codes. My code categories grew from 70 to about 200 for the complete amount of participant interviews as I included larger titles of temporality, sociality, and place, resulting in sub-headings (i.e., “Sociality – teacher respects students” and in some cases double-coded them to fit additional categories) until I realized I needed to refine my thinking and my process.

Through this intense coding process, the analysis of narrative became illusive to me. In my effort to code everything, I was unable to thematically code anything. Having lost the connection between the part and the whole, the data seemingly expanded outward, becoming alarmingly granular and unmanageable. To illustrate this dilemma, I had effectively created individual threads and laid each one out on a large blank canvas with little potential connection, and therefore, no matter how long I grappled with threads of individually coded data, they would not come together in any sustainable pattern because I could not see the bigger picture. After revisiting some *NVivo* tutorials, I began to understand that my initial analysis of narrative was not the best way to code. I did not need to enter the analysis process with complete unknowing, because I had interviewed these participants and told their stories. Therefore, while the *NVivo* process was a good method to illuminate all possible threads, I now needed to employ a process that would recognize connections at a thematic level or at least have ideas of titles that were categories, or bundles of threads, prior to applying *NVivo* coding. This new approach would give me a larger “whole” in which to view participant stories. As stated in chapter three, I maintained a researcher journal during each of the interviews. These notes captured my impressions,

reflections, and some of what the participants said during the time of the interviews. I consulted this journal to anchor myself to my thoughts recorded in the moment of actually interacting with a participant. I did not transcribe the journal, and it served me as a place to begin my rethinking while I recoded.

During my subsequent attempt, I reread original participant data and let themes emerge. As I took notes on the words of each participant, I began to see larger topics that included and illuminated my initial 200 categories, so I could regroup the codes as they applied to most participants. I reexamined the data initially coded in *NVivo*, paying special attention to the codes with the most numbers of passages. After looking at my hand-written notes, I combined codes that were closely related in *NVivo*. At this point, some *NVivo* codes became insignificant and some were duplicate codes from my first coding process. I created larger thematic topics and placed *child nodes* (subheadings) under larger categories, grouping ideas within participant's words. Through these refined processes, themes emerged across participants. I have selected codes that became the most frequently coded in *NVivo*, those confirmed by my hand-written coded notes, and those significant to my research questions. Before examining these themes, I first begin with an illustration or metaphor to assist the understanding of the analysis that follows.

### **Free Weaving Without the Rigid Loom**

When I was a young married woman with little or no money to decorate our first abode, I found what I thought was a beautiful piece of a branch outside our apartment. I brought it inside and looked at it and set it on a table. Later, I took out some twine and hung vertical threads, like the warp on a loom. Except this was not a weaver's loom, it was to be a free weaving piece. I set odd pieces of ribbon and other smaller branches as weft threads, loosely weaving various threads under and over the jute threads that were the warp and back in the other direction. I did not finish

the piece that day, but looked at it every day, adding something new. As I occasionally stood some distance away from it to see my work, something emerged as I faithfully added to the warp. Quite unplanned but open to a serendipitous moment (Wang, 2014), I had begun to create a memory weaving or free form weaving of things that I could not replicate due to the fibers and found objects that cost nothing, but were impossible to replace because they were discovered on walks outside our apartment, rather than purchased from a store. After this unique weaving had grown to about 30-inches-long, I stopped and tied off the bottom, so the weft threads would not fall out. There was quite a length of warp thread left and so at any time, I could untie and begin weaving again. While the physical piece is gone, the experience is unforgettable, and I offer its indelible image as part of my story that explains the connections of the individual stories to a larger whole in this analysis.

Similar to my weaving described above, the analysis of narrative that follows includes findings from all participant experiences contained within a metaphorically single tapestry. I imagine participants' stories are like threads in various colors and in different thicknesses of weft threads, and found objects, like beads that are woven intermittently into our story. These determine the path of the weft threads themselves. In other words, sometimes part of the tapestry is thicker in places like weft threads completely surrounding important themes, similar to anchor points, which converge, and the participant's experiences do likewise. Also, not all participants' weft threads touch all points, or themes. Perhaps this means I did not see these specific themes in their data, but not that they do not exist in some way for the participant. Furthermore, not every significant event discussed in participant interviews is represented in this portion of the dissertation. For more complete stories, please read chapters four and five. Additionally, the tapestry has overlapping portions in which there are blurred edges that may appear to connect to

different places, or more likely, it is difficult to distinguish where one idea stops and another begins, much like human experiences. I will discuss significant threads in the analysis that follows.

### **A Closer Look**

Threads of my participants' stories are knotted together as they view their life and tell of their experiences from a backward glance, integrating their conscious and unconscious knowing (Carl Jung as cited in Wang, 2005). Fowler (2006) explains in teaching that "sempiternal [unchanging] difficulty abounds where all the sub-textual underpinnings and hidden curricula swell underneath teaching and learning relationships, a rigorous narrative method enables me to better understand questions of difficulty in education and what it means to teach" (p. 15). Therefore, in this chapter I seek to understand these teachers and their experiences through the lens of difficulty and the meanings they make. In this section, I discuss metaphorical threads swirling around this specific section in the tapestry concept to which I have been referring to as a reference to initially anchoring my thoughts and notions. I continue by directing the reader in this way: I concentrate my gaze upon this important portion of the tapestry. It is as if we have stepped closer to the weaving and our focus is on a smaller section. It now occupies all our attention and it is all we view.

Next, I will discuss three main analytical threads. The first is loss and its acceptance. The teacher is willing to work with this loss or trauma as transformative. The second is that participants practice the care of the self and nonviolent action in order to keep dynamic pedagogical spaces open for themselves and their students. Then meaning making is possible.



### **Willing to Work with Painful Experiences**

Wang (2005) discusses the parable of “The Incurable Wound” mentioned in Adeline Yen Mah’s autobiography, *Falling Leaves*. Briefly, the wound in this story is intentional damage done to harm a young artist by a relative who has nefarious intent. The wound does not heal, and in spite of it, the widely admired young artist paints with ever-growing acumen. The wound is not a curable impediment; rather it becomes a “source of inspiration” (p. 140). As long as one learns to live with and work through pain the wound is stripped of its deleterious effect. All participants in this study discuss varying degrees of painful life-experiences, a wound that results in loss. Most discuss these issues in such a way that shows their bereavement, grief, and mourning. We commonly think of grief as a response to death; however, Maddrell (2016) reminds us there are nuances to loss, which include the loss of a home, job, death of a pet, isolation, being robbed of something immaterial or material. For this study, I do not make a distinction between grief and mourning, but I think that being willing to work with painful experiences is an important theme of my participants’ stories.

### **Loss is One Knot of Life Experiences**

I created broad and open-ended interview questions allowing the participants to choose which stories to reveal. Most participants recall painful, wounding, lived-experience occurring in their childhood or young adulthood. These are significant parts of their personal narratives and these “...narratives signify a knot, a matrix of issues” (Fowler, 2006, p. 8) and may define spaces between the practice of teaching and the teacher. Discussing what is seen is to discuss it thematically and “describe the content to the notion” (van Manen, 1997, p. 88). The notion of loss and the tensions arising from them as seen in the lived-experiences of my participants are threads that weave in and out, swirling around the experience of loss. It is worthwhile to point

out that discussing this notion is in no way a complete, exhaustive portrayal of the participants' lives, but underscores instead the significance of a theme emerged in most participant's stories and therefore this analysis.

Several participants (Bea, Nanci, Morgan, Carman, and Aracella) spent a great deal of interview time revealing and expounding about the wounding and troubling issues that occurred in their youth and continue to be part of their lives. Participants recount their experiences, accompanied by a shaky voice and some tears. Let us first explore the concept of the wound and the experiences of loss as shared by the participants. They all suffer from loss one way or another. For Carman it was her parent's divorce and her separation from her birth father. Nanci is the product of a broken marriage and then lived in a society that isolated her because she was different. Bea's mother ignores Bea when her father sexually abuses her. Morgan is widowed twice, with both of his wives dying suddenly. While he states he was at first shocked and grieved, he also states that he learned to accept that people die and that we are all on this earth for a finite amount of time. Participants' negative or disturbing events may be related in a second generational, indirect way to the participant. For example, Aracella witnessed her parents dealing with racially othered people in her small town and the resulting hate-filled responses they endured. Although the trauma did not happen directly to her, she feels negatively toward the incidences that brought her parents pain, yet she has woven these experiences into her life story. They have become her story. From these experiences, she understands the cost of being an ally and states this is one of the reasons she taught Holocaust education, making it a point to warn students of being bystanders. Some allude to the wounding of their students. For example, Monica emphasizes that students are suffering and she demonstrates a deep care of and admiration of students as they endure trauma.

It is not surprising that these participants, who are aware of loss and wounding in their own lives, find Holocaust education an educational topic that is a way of addressing the needs of students. The topic is relatable to the teachers because they have experienced negative and difficult life experiences, emotions, and accepted that these are part of the tapestry of life. They also understand and have compassion for students who are presently enduring traumatic life experiences. Participants choose to engage with and therefore broaden their ability to delve deeply into difficult historical content. Their ability to accept what is humanly difficult helps them deal with difficult pedagogy.

### Accepting Loss

Most participants reveal different and painful occurrences, sometimes using words such as “bad and ugly” (Bea, personal writing) to describe the wound, and later she refers her adult familial and teaching relationships as significant to her. In most participant stories, trauma gradually becomes part of life and dealing with it leads to change over time, but not as a result of one singular epiphany. The willingness to weave and the acceptance of loss are closely related, in that recognition of loss is one thing and accepting it could be seen as part of commitment to continuing the work of weaving within the teaching relationship that involves the self and others. For example, because of life circumstances, Nanci grew up without her natural father in a place where she alone was racially unique. She had a lighter skin tone than everyone else and suffered from this difference because other children made fun of her through name-calling and isolation. She was able to recognize that she is not to blame for her difference and recognized that how she was cruelly treated for years was not a result of her own doing.

Each participant’s events are different because life is different for everyone. Wang (2005) calls the traumatic event, a “wound of loss that is also a site for longing, a longing for what is

impossible” (p. 142). The impossible, to which Wang (2005) refers, is when an individual attempts to wish away the difficulty and pain of the traumatic event or to return to a place devoid of it. Since trauma has already occurred, it has to be dealt with and teachers continue to do so. Acceptance is not when the individual comes to a full understanding of why it happened. Instead, most participants accept that their understandings may not fully come and the pain is still present, but life will go on with a deeper integration of self. As participants speak of experiences, they demonstrate the process of accepting loss, much like Adeline Yen Mah’s stories (Wang, 2005).

Yen Mah’s mother died in childbirth, resulting in her becoming alienated from her father, and the cruel treatment she received from her stepmother, which created a “disastrous childhood for her” (p. 141). Despite efforts to win parental approval throughout her life, she eventually accepts that her stepmother hates her and as her father selfishly isolates himself, it allows her stepmother to continually demonstrate cruelty toward her. Much like my participants’ stories, eventually there comes acceptance of the life they are living. They each live with years of their unsettled soul; that is to say they exist alongside with negative feelings of not being understood, living with harsh, unfair treatment and cruelty, but they are able to demonstrate strength in their resolve to rise above anger and hatred (Nagler, 2004).

My participants deal with this uncomfortable place in a way that Britzman (1998) explains as that which “confronts and gives space to the transformation of memory to tolerate the difficulty for a time of belated understanding” (p. 118). They hold their painful experiences of despair and helplessness without being destroyed by them. During this time, which may last a lifetime, there is no way to measure or determine exactly what and when meaning transpires. Because as Britzman (1998) states, the learner, or in the case of this study – the participant – must have patience with incommensurability (what cannot be measured) of understanding and

tolerance with what is fractured, broken and lost until it becomes conscious and eventually consolation. In their stories, most of my participants demonstrate they have done this and are living with difficulty and not eliminating painful experiences from the narrative of their lives. They do not offer simplistic platitudes as a way of comforting the broken parts of their stories and in so doing they do not accept total blame or complicity for the initial trauma. They live with the discomfort that accompanies trauma, and deal with the messiness of initial hurt and rejection, but make efforts to not wither within the guilt.

Britzman (1998) states it is possible for individuals to refuse to accept living with difficult knowledge especially since negativity and dealing with loss is painfully grim. Yet, my participants, who are experienced teachers, give testament to the internal work of holding on to their awareness of the wounding from painful experiences as a way of confrontation in order to integrate these wounds into their lives. The individual must face the issue without being overcome with grief or simply blaming others. They try to understand conditions that contribute to others' lives as a way of letting go. For example, Bea states her father was never loved and then he was sent away after his father died to be raised by a cruel uncle. Nanci remarks that her mother's only option was to live alone in a foreign land with its native people while raising her because moving back to her homeland was not possible. Aracella remembers her father and mother aligned themselves with racially different people and experienced persecution because of it; being bystanders or collaborators in other's suffering was not an acceptable option for them. Holding steady by facing, not avoiding but rather balancing the difficultness as one waits through the time of what Britzman (1998) calls "belatedness" (p. 118) is when learning is continually made from loss. This learning from difficulty is itself arduous because it is only later that these experiences remotely make sense and other outcomes emerge from it. But, in this

process one has to endure the intensity of trauma and move away from the epicenter in order to be “transformed into sensitivity to the vibration of life and compassions for others” (Wang, 2005, p. 142).

The acceptance of the wound is also the willingness to live with unanswered questions, a willingness to be unsettled or disturbed. Bea does not and cannot fully explain how her father began to abuse her and why or how her mother ignored this knowledge; however, Bea learned to accept that it did happen and she could not completely make sense of it, not that any justification could be an acceptable cause for abuse. It is plausible to see that a child undergoing abuse may blame themselves, and Bea feels guilty, but she also challenges her family’s version of truth. As a teacher she is able to recognize signs within her students that not all is right and she deals with this knowing by seeking further help for students in crisis. Nanci acknowledges she was racially different and bullied because of it and states she leans on this reality of her childhood when dealing with students who are experiencing similar emotions and feeling isolated. She teaches about the Holocaust because it is a historical example of the epitome of bullying, a connection she can make from her own life experience. Through their difficult experiences, participants can see that humans are capable of heinous action against other humans. They find this shocking and while pain is part of their memory, it is also a bridge to be more compassionate with students and empathetic to their students’ experiences. Participants recognize and talk about the importance of this ability as a root of productive relationship-building with students and with difficult curriculum. Acceptance of difficulty bridges their ability to relate and offer compassionate, well-informed teaching while traversing the difficult curriculum of complex history that involves human degradation and on the other side of that complete unselfishness as seen in Holocaust history and survivor stories.

## Working with Trauma as Transformative

Fowler (2006) explains that in teaching sempiternal difficulty abounds but there are stories that explain and illuminate so that we can gain glimpses of what is beneath the complexity. In this way, stories and narration helps us understand what it means to teach (p. 15). Through the inclusion of the traumatic within their life stories, participants practice their ability to speak and write about their experiences, without which there would be immense holes and incomplete ideas. Most participants interpret his or her life curricula with the inclusion of traumatizing events and explain their coping with difficulty as transformative because they live their lives and teach their students out of this difficulty, what Britzman (1998) calls the increased “capacity to respond” (p. 129). In telling their stories, participants make clear the complex strands of trauma, suffering, and wounding which become more visible to each of us, both participant and researcher, as they tell more of their narratives. They wonder about the questions of “why” even though they do not have full answers. Difficulties, including traumatic life events are memorable and most return to those memories even as they articulate their teaching experiences or other life stories. They pinpoint the life-changing, significant traumatic event as integral to their teaching, especially their relationships with students. Prior to Aracella discussing her teaching, she had already discussed her parents’ ordeal with racist townspeople and how their helping of a black woman put them at risk. Through transforming her teaching, Aracella adjusted her way of teaching so that she could relate better to her students. Through adjusting her pedagogy, she became more engaged in her teaching and her students found her more inclusive and their studies became more relevant. Becoming engaged with content and students also requires time for the teacher to learn to accept him or herself.

## Practicing the Care of the Self and Engaging Nonviolent Action

### The Care of the Self

I will address engagement with curriculum and others as work of the self through nonviolent action. Through this work, these teachers make long-term commitments to Holocaust education possible. Justin Infinito (2003) deals with Foucault's notion of "self-formation" (Infinito, 2003, p. 158) as the idea of freedom of the self from subjugation, a necessary practice to combat whatever threatens to exert total control over us. Infinito (2003) informs us that Foucault's notion rejects a self that is subjugated to outside forces and questions any force that imposes a normative definition of one's self. Instead, Foucault discusses "the care of the self" (Foucault, 1988; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Infinito, 2003) as a way of questioning conventions that confine the self to the norm and of creating the new self. They invite a deeper relationship with themselves, and open up space for new layers of the self. Normalizing power is perhaps evidenced within our society when people are singularly labeled as victim, loner, or a poor teacher – a few of the frequently used labels that simplistically define individuals and human life. Most participants in my study reject such labels and embrace an integrated, complex self. For example, Bea states she did not want to be a victim to her father's abuse and claims her own agency and creativity in life and teaching. Even though Carman did not feel she belonged due to her family situation, she does not perceive herself as a loner because she planned to create her own family. She said that as a young person, she knew that she would one day share the same name as her future children of her future relationship. She would not feel alone for the whole of her life. Aracella invited growth in her teaching life when she developed from being a "hot mess" to teaching with openness and inclusion, a changed instructor through years of experience. She



realizes she must let go of her strict, singular ideas of learning methods, and allow her students to respond to Holocaust learning with their own fiction writing.

Participants speak of their life as one that changes. Their teaching also changes through experience, teacher learning, and their own openness to experiment with different pedagogical methods learned on their own or through academic and curriculum training. This change is gradual, much like learning, and there is no sudden epiphany that leaves the participant forever changed. Making decisions in favor of growing the self, learning opportunities that are accepted and taken, risks in learning and teaching all help the participant change and shift through their careers. Through these movements, participants establish a personal boundary by which they reject a simple victimhood and create for themselves a way to be different, better and more fully integrated in their lives as teachers. They become more complete, complex, and unselfish, thereby fluid, not rigid, in their ability to accept themselves and others as they develop as humans and teachers.

In addition to retelling loss, participants integrate wounding into their present temporality and base their learned ability to see value through practicing the care of the self. As a result, they know and understand themselves better and see a truth about themselves that includes several truths. For instance, there is pain, but they are not forever damaged. Life for these teachers is not stagnant because there is an ongoing ‘construction of the subject’ and of new subjectivities (Foucault, 1988; Wang, 2005) and they make new meanings from integral practice. These experienced teachers exemplify personal courage, much like the courage in holding up one’s own boundary, sometimes seen as a protective stance from which to think and have one’s truth, despite feelings of confusion and fear. For example, Bea was bewildered by her parent’s actions. Aracella was aware of her parents being persecuted while they promoted racial equality. Both

events are scary incidents for anyone, but even more so when viewed through the lens of a child's eye. The care of the self requires courage while doing memory work to integrate fragmented aspects of the self.

This courageous self-care is accompanied by optimism, rather than despondency to see the possibility of surviving pain (i.e., unpleasant, and potentially life damaging trauma), and in an existential way, they shift intact to another place in their lives. Carman states she was and is a happy person, and appreciates the life she lived with her mother even though they were poor. She also appreciates the different life she lived when her mother remarries. While she endured strict parental limitations, she focuses on what she has gained. She lives with personally appropriate boundaries or stances that allow the acceptance of self. She did recognize her parents were overly strict or controlling and prohibited her from socializing or playing sports, a fact that she does not dwell on, but nevertheless shares. Her choice is to be courageous and remain whole in response to pain. The care of the self is integral in relating through the notion of nonviolence. Teachers who demonstrate the nonviolent method of self-care are observing their own limits and thereby becoming participants in the difficult pedagogical space of allowing their students to grow.

Nagler (2004) states that nonviolence is impossible to understand all at once, and it is impossible to make a statement that encompasses all of what nonviolence is, not only because it would take volumes to do so, but we must also observe it in action. Looking at self-care as one component of nonviolence participants as teachers practice when they accept their imperfect selves and are willing to tell those parts of their stories that may be open to judgment or scrutiny. They extend acceptance to themselves by working through with their emotional state and not hating the other person(s) who could be seen as the source of hurt and disappointment. In their

classrooms, they work to keep complicated history and human experience as part of the taught and lived curriculum. They learn to retell narratives of survival and of others' sacrifice without becoming distracted by emotion. They teach their students to delve into these deeply sensitive narratives that require deeper inspection in order to integrate content and understanding.

Respecting the position of others, while knowing content well enough to discuss the complications of historical interpretation are important when teaching students to understand and are developed with a teacher who is committed to and engaged in study. For example, as students are taught to respect the complex issues of life, death, and survival without scoffing at choices that seem unreal and therefore on the surface, poor ones, teachers become at a basic level the antithesis of Holocaust denial and teach the historical events of the Shoah.

Deniers use the outrageousness of history and the "plague of hatred" to question the possibility of the incident itself (p. xvii). The uneducated are likely to side with the impossibility of the extermination of six million (and more) and sink into disbelief that the Shoah was an actual event (Lipstadt, 1993). Continuing effective education is basic to keeping the numbers of deniers from growing further: however, this phenomenon will never be eradicated. For example, many students read the novel, *Anne Frank* and often they ask why the Franks did not escape, but rather went into hiding? The experienced Holocaust educator explains to students that the family was originally from Germany, and relocated to Amsterdam to escape encroaching Nazi control. By 1942 when the family went into hiding, the Nuremberg Laws prevented the family from going anywhere due to required governmental documentation and sponsorship and the lack of countries that would take immigrants. Students who are taught to see *Anne Frank*, through this light and within the historical context can understand the influence of racism on politics and human suffering. They see the possibility of the criminalizing of a group of people, artificially

labeled by another group of people. When teachers can explain this and equip their students for these types of confrontations, they protect them from faulty thinking and fortify their ability to guard historical truth. Teachers can also help students focus on what they truly believe about history and about others and then students can build their own sense of self with regard to Holocaust education.

Through nonviolent approaches focused on self-care, teachers help students become more compassionate, and less judgmental, empathetic and less dismissive of human feelings and experiences. These teachers work from within at a deep level in order to work with and accept students and difficult knowledge. These teachers provide sound practice with consistency and encouragement in the midst of living and learning which is an example of nonviolence in teaching. My participants teach because ignorance claimed by those who were bystanders during the Shoah should never happen. Participants remind me that “it must be taught” (Interview with Bea) and “this is my calling” (Interview with Aracella).

My participants have emotional ability to welcome a range of issues that students will encounter as they react or respond to the difficult historical trauma, especially because “the Holocaust is unlike any other” (Morris, 2001). They indicate that they are also careful to promote freedom in their appropriate relationships with students. Sheldon underscores the importance that his students broaden their concept of religious identity by showing pictures of real people and asking students to examine their own stereotypes based on physical appearances. Most teachers transform themselves by being open to others by accepting themselves (Wang, in Wang & Olson, 2009) and realizing their connection to self and others is a shifting, evolving process. Most of my participants demonstrate their embrace of new possibilities as method to shift to fuller integrated lives, intact and more aware. Accepting and transforming through difficult life experiences,

participants accept teaching about the full spectrum of human tragedy is a curriculum of difficulty (Fowler, 2006), and one that nevertheless must be taught.

Each participant teacher was exposed to Holocaust education in a variety of ways; Aracella and Sheldon needed to develop classes in their respective schools; Bea and Carman wanted to learn more after teaching the novel *Anne Frank*; and for Monica, Nanci, and Morgan, the Holocaust is part of World War II history. Each participant, despite how they were initially introduced to Holocaust education, volunteeringly continue their engagement, desiring to grow through learning and teaching. Despite pressures of testing and tight curriculum schedules, these teachers will carve out space in their plans to teach about the Holocaust. Monica has said her once, three-week unit, is now about five days. Nanci states the time devoted to teaching about the Holocaust in her then current year is less than one week, and as a result of limited time, she included a mini-response and art project for students. She proudly told how students learned through methods such as group work and research.

Most importantly, all participants speak of the importance of the inclusion of Holocaust education in their taught curriculum. Through their dedication, they demonstrate their devotion and believe in Holocaust education as important for their students. I suggest that each participant chooses to emotionally engage with Holocaust content and are able to because they have personally dealt with the *curriculum of difficulty* in their own lives. In the following section, I continue the discussion on participants' growing sensitivity to their students as a result of their life experiences and nonviolent choices. In the next section, I discuss what is meant by nonviolence and how this fortifies the teacher's ability to remain within *difficulty*. The difficulty is seen in the participant's life experience with wounding and trauma of varying degrees and of

the struggle with maintaining the dynamic pedagogical space involved in learning, content, and in pedagogy.

### **Engaging Nonviolent Action**

Remaining with difficulty, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, can be heavy work, requiring willingness and humility. It is easier for one to go where there is less resistance and so remaining in difficulty requires fortitude, but not rigidity. It is also challenging to remain with difficulty because in some ways the process of remaining is ambiguous and locating personal meaning from it takes time (Smythe, 2015). Smythe (2015) writes that the ambiguous also is a place of openness and “enables multiplicity to thrive” (p. 222). Therefore, a person in a place of tension can use nonviolent methods to cope with the difficulty of living until strength is built to stand at the opening where meaning can be made. I begin by defining the notion of *ahimsa* as a basic tenant and Nagler’s (2004) definition of nonviolence.

Nagler (2004) explains the notion of *ahimsa*, which in Sanskrit [an ancient Indic language of India] means much more than the opposite of violence. He states we must realize that “nonviolence, by whatever name, is a positive force that holds the solution to most of our major personal, social, and global problems” (p. 45). Nagler (2004) defines nonviolence as action, meaning that this is not passive resistance, but rather an act of the will. He posits that we must give ourselves space to better think in order to change our focus. This is difficult work because we are generally taught to act in the opposite way. For example, if someone is cruel to us, the expected response is anger and a poor reaction that damages the other and ourselves. Nonviolence is the act of forgiveness that is able to change relationships, not instantly, but over time. Each participant in this study shared the death of something, a type of loss, resulting in the loss of something precious and then an opportunity to accept the loss over time. In this way

nonviolence is based in temporality and made mobile with the continuous processes of the teacher and their choosing to accept. This act or choice is not made once, but over and over with each personal encounter to love, to learn, to interact and not react. Nagler (2004) also describes *power-based love*: a concept based in spirituality that when engaged is a force enabling individuals to remain engaged despite difficulty (p. 124). Participants engaged in their practices as teachers demonstrate a willingness to move through emotions and viewpoints, not getting stuck, but returning to the borders of learning and teaching with fluidity and care.

I briefly remind the reader that each participant has had an opportunity to hate someone or something due to his or her life experiences, and has chosen not to. Nagler (2004) states “hate is the real problem” (p. 6), meaning that hate is at the root of violence and it shows itself in multiple ways. Hate of family members who hurt or despise us; hate of ourselves because we respond in unappealing ways; and hate of the world because it is an evil place, are each circumstance that can stir up the hate within my participants. Instead, they choose not to hate. These teachers remained engaged in teaching and found fulfillment and joy from engaging with students and in teaching challenging content. Choosing to remain fluid, not entrenched or stuck in negativity, is key to engagement and also to the fulfillment I just referred to and this requires another method besides staying stuck emotionally. If teachers were to remain entrenched, they could not teach in this complex space. Teachers in this study choose nonviolent responses to the curriculum of self, others, and content to rise above hate and live with tensions and find inspiration to continue on.

Threads of nonviolent action support my participants dealing with their own internal struggle with life and in teaching. Nagler (2004) states the notion of nonviolence is essential for all humans in order that we may begin to grapple with life’s complexity. He states nonviolence is

not for cowards, but rather for those who use real courage in living with and recognizing violence, and then choose to be nonviolent in response to difficult, traumatic, violent situations. Violence is a universal problem that includes hate of any kind and of varying degree. It is visible in any situation, nation, and organization. Nonviolence is an act of an individual or a collective and requires discipline in which a person must step back from personal hurt and think about inhumanity in general. This is to say that nonviolence is not selfish, but rather humble. For example, it takes strength to think before lashing out when we are hurt by words or actions of a person or group of people. Nagler recommends a solution to responding out of anger when one is hurt, confused or discouraged:

We have to slow down our initial reactions – not by any means the same thing as losing out intensity of our feelings about the problem, but on the contrary – in order to convert those valuable feelings from fear, panic, or resentment into determination. The more clearly we can see the underlying causes, the better we'll be able to identify the long-lasting, and only real solution (2004, p. 10).

Teaching and living through nonviolence means building resilience through learning and understanding the process requires time and commitment.

Most participants in my study deal with painful situations using nonviolence by way of implementing appropriate boundaries in their reactions (e.g., none of the teachers talk about a revenge tactic, but rather how they have used their wound to do well, teach well, and to live with compassion). A specific example is Carman who uses the word, “choose” (Interview with Carman). She chooses to be happy, even when “life comes up and bumps us” (Interview with Carman). Other participants extend forgiveness and display a sense of empathy to others. Carman says she processes the idea of humanity as a complex issue when faced with life-



threatening circumstances, would a person debase him or herself for a piece of bread? (Interview with Carman). Monica, in talking about students in general, said we have no idea how difficult being a high school student is and the demands placed on them are staggering. Bea remembers she extended forgiveness to her parents long before she had to say it at her father's deathbed. Morgan did not blame his wives for their sudden deaths, nor did he blame himself for not recognizing danger signs involved with prescription drugs. These participants demonstrated nonviolent responses to their life circumstances, thereby holding open a space of new meaning making to emerge. Britzman (1998, p. 118) says of the teacher's ability to wait for meaning:

The learner must be willing both to confront outside knowledge as a mode of address that demands the learner's transformation of memory to tolerate the psychic of existential time, the time of the belatedness of understanding. Learning from demands both a patience with the incommensurability of understanding and an interest in tolerating the ways meaning becomes, for the learner, fractured, broken, and lost exceeding the affirmations of rationality, consciousness, and consolation.

These considerations make teachers more human and in so doing they invite their students to join them in meaning-making spaces of pedagogy.

### **Creating Meanings in Life and Teaching**

Pinar (2015) explains that becoming more human, in some cases means becoming what we have not been yet. It means being different than what we have been. He suggests that so much of our human existence deals with violence or oppression. To be different, we must cultivate higher qualities that build on compassion and understanding. He continues his thoughts by considering Freire's (1980) notion of oppression and working against it as applied to teaching

as a human endeavor; the teacher must discuss, converse, and communicate with students and through cultivation of thought, our action also changes and we become different. Aoki (2005, p. 213) explains the word pedagogy as a blend of two words, *agogue* (to lead) and *pedae* (children). Beyond the literal translation of words, he wonders what pedagogy means or looks like in the practice of teaching, and defines it as the relationship between the “teacher and taught and between the self and other” (p. 213). The teacher, the pedagogue, holds relationship between the curriculum, what is taught, and students and does so with a sense of wonder and humility. Aoki (2005) references Emmanuel Levinas in naming this kind of humility as the decentering of the self’s ego. Similar to the wound that does not heal, addressed in the previous section, this humility of knowing and understanding connects to teaching and learning so that it remains open to new meanings.

For the teachers in this study, this dynamic relational space, which includes painful experiences, remains open in order to generate new curricular meanings for themselves and for their students. This generative space of openness is uncomfortable and painful in some ways but necessary because the participants are willing to bring uncertainty into the space of teaching and learning. Of course, the teachers are studious and faithful to their learning and that of their students; however, students may not learn what the teacher intends, they may not respond in ways expected, and the lesson may not go as planned. These teachers are open to the unexpected, not having the exact answer to complex issues, but willing to work out with students’ accepted and new understandings. In other words, these teachers hold open this space, the “gaps and interstices” (Wang, 2005, p. 143) where meanings are expressed and understood facilitated by their years of practice.

In studying Holocaust content, there is tragedy after worsening tragedy, and the sensitive teacher will reserve pedagogical space within this uncomfortable place despite not being able to have happy endings. Teachers who are committed to the study of the Holocaust and responsibly teaching it offer opportunities for deepening understanding of self, others, and of the human experience. With regard to Holocaust historical content, there are no happy endings; there are only understandings of pain, seen in the individual experiences of historical figures, and then communal suffering (i.e., the German invasion of France), and then as universal suffering; the continued human cruelty against one another.

Participants in this study teach their students about resiliency and courage demonstrated in stories of those who were heroes and of those who survived the Holocaust. To do so, they research and learn about content through study and travel, and then teach their students from their new learning. They are willing to answer students' questions, or admit that they do not know the answers, and finally are exploring unknown spaces. For example, students will ask generalized questions such as, "Why didn't the Jews run away from persecution?" The experienced Holocaust pedagogue will recognize that this is indeed a complex question disguised in simplicity. An experienced teacher will understand this tension and will accept further study on their part to begin to discover the complexity of possible answers. A committed, studied-teacher will have learned how to peel back the layers of complexity to facilitate comprehending the difficult curriculum, thus making it possible for students to understand what it means to be human in our world and to relate to others in our present time.

In this pedagogical relational dynamic, the threads are loosely drawn together because there remains the following necessary space:

- Space between teachers and teacher learning;

- Teachers and teaching; and
- Between teachers and student learning.

This space is within teachers and without, and necessary in order for other meanings and others' realities to emerge into newness and difference from what either side understood before. For example, the teacher can understand that teaching and learning helps students remain "spontaneous, curious, poking, exploring, questioning" (Huebner, 1999, p. 1), largely because the teacher preserves an open space and has not squashed or squelched student inquiry. Therefore, students grow and transform through their learning and the teacher is a part of it.

The teacher also must be open to the same transformation, to study with discipline and yet welcome the unanswered as part of their learning, and to accept the place where one has landed, knowing that something new can result from discussion, dialogue, and productive dissent. Teachers and students can ask "why" together in an effort to further their understandings. This shared questioning keeps the rigor of study for teachers because they are being students themselves, and then they promote learning in and with students, knowing that the outcome of which cannot be fully controlled. Sometimes students learn what teachers did not plan, and so teachers must guide from their own ethic of knowing, because they have studied, visited, traveled to learn, and researched Holocaust related issues. Other times, students discover additional learning outside the teacher's purview. Teachers deal with this by explaining they do not know an answer about the new discovery but are willing to find the answer.

Aracella told a story of a time when she took her students to see a Holocaust display. Students were inspired and spent the entire trip discussing and using their ride back as question and answer time. Rather than keep to themselves, Aracella notes that students were engaged with content and were engaged with her. According to Aracella, this was a significant change as this,

spontaneous student engagement, never happened before. This time, students were positively excited about their learning and they were questioning her and so was a part of their dialogue. Bea remarks that when students began to have more questions than she could answer regarding the Shoah, she knew she would have to increase her study. This led her to write a grant to travel to Washington, D.C., to study at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). All participants talk about their learning as vital to their classroom and to opening new areas of inquiry and study. Most have traveled locally and internationally to conferences that most often deal with history and the Shoah. At the time of her interview, Nanci had just returned from Advanced Placement training in another city. Monica was on her way to a large multi-day fellowship for history teachers to hone their skills in teaching history.

Morgan writes about history and contributes to websites as a blogger specifically on World War II (WWII) films. Sheldon travels every summer. While not every trip is directly related to the Shoah, he finds a way to bring our conversation back to teaching the Holocaust as he shows me pictures of where he has just traveled to in Europe. Carman brings copies of her own reading to her classroom and lets students borrow copies of her books. Bea stocks her classroom library with multiple copies of books that she has personally read on the Shoah, for students to borrow and read. Participants write grants to facilitate their learning opportunity and attend seminars in order to keep their content and teaching skills sharpened. They keep the spark of learning about complex issues concerning the Shoah by keeping an awareness of this need for openness, the acceptance of a pedagogical dynamic space that is exciting and uncomfortable, and a willingness to maintain openness through their own study and classroom attitude. The teachers' position as a learner also contributes to their shift into pedagogy that is student-centered and

inclusive and away from a teacher-directed, dictated classroom, another essential characteristic to maintaining a generative pedagogical space.

### **Dynamic Generative Pedagogical Relationship: First for the teacher**

Because these teachers practice relationship building within their teaching, they recognize student differences, craft lessons for students they are teaching and in the process regenerating themselves. My participants become emotional when relating portions of their teaching life that talk about their students' trauma and pain, which also mirrors teacher emotional engagement with their own life trauma. There is a productive suffering because it yields living in a place of strength, courage and forgiveness. Nanci teaches her students to be compassionate to others and to be aware of the political climate that excludes and criminalizes difference. Bea is sensitive to children undergoing stressful circumstances, like abuse. In other words, the participants are not callous to their own experiences, but use what they have experienced to teach with open hearts. The participants' awareness of their personal experiences and how this helps them work with students is essential to pedagogy and incorporates humility. This awareness is what Aoki (2005) refers to as the decentering of one's ego, as mentioned before, as essential to teaching, to "hearken the call that is teaching" and to listen to the voice of the silent other (p. 213). The work of the teacher in commitment to teaching, learning, and to use pedagogical methods that include students are open to new meanings because the teacher is open to engagement at this level.

### **Spiritual Calling: Ways to Sustain Engagement and Awareness**

In this final section, I discuss the characteristics participants demonstrated when considering their dispositions and attitudes from which they engage pedagogically and build relationships with content, curriculum, and with their students. Teachers utilize their connection

with themselves in continuing their involvement with Holocaust curriculum, and they build classroom relationships that are open, not overly controlling largely because they practice this in their own lives. Through their stories, they exemplify openness through a spirituality as a way of being while dealing with students and difficult curriculum. To explain this I will discuss notions of Aoki's (2005) third space and Nagler's (2004) integrative power as significant ways teachers practice this openness.

### *Aoki's Third Space*

Aoki (2005) explains that a "third space, is the space in-between" (p. 15), which means that there are many in-between places, such as curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived through relational understanding of self and then of others. According to Aoki, the quality of life and learning within these tensions depend on the teacher. Aoki (2005) says the teacher works in-between, in the midst, but not "obsessively so" (p. 15). In other words, these teachers work in human spaces (Nagler, 2004) and remain fluid, flexible, and hope-filled without controlling the situation and students completely. I suggest that these experienced teachers in this study work from within and then without, a glow from within that touches the relationships without – curriculum, content, students, and back again to regenerate them. This within work sustains their engagement with curriculum and brings joy and relevance to their teaching and to their lives as teachers. Teaching and learning in the pedagogical dynamic space is a swirling, dynamic middle we can call tension, held together in balance, and it is cultivated with and by a pedagogue who is willing to engage emotionally beyond cognition. While understanding the importance of being a teacher and teaching, most participants understand there is more. I refer to this type of in-between, the third space, as interconnection of dynamic tension and spirituality. I used the word spirituality to represent the part of us as humans that lies beyond physical knowing and is not

necessarily related to religion, since religion is not addressed in this dissertation. Spirituality is related to how we are aware of the value of each other. It is how we understand lived experience and find appreciation for multiple lived experiences. In this remaining portion of chapter six, I continue to address my participants' spirituality in teaching that somewhat defines how they continue to remain committed to teaching in difficult spaces.

### *Ecumenism*

Education is emotional, and therefore tied to us as humans beyond the physical space of the classroom. Williams (2001) writes about Holocaust education as education with spiritual dimension. She states spirituality exists in education because we are human with spiritual capacity and we need a “non-coercive spiritual space that is inclusive in public education” (p. 2). Williams (2001) further posits:

The word *ecumenical* needs to mean more than working together on occasional uncontroversial charities and learning just enough to avoid major faux pas. The concept of *deep ecumenism* has emerged to refer to this openness to sharing more than social causes and information (p. 3).

As stated within this section, the type of spirituality told from participants' stories show their concept of humanity is seen beyond group and identity politics. They see the human experience as shared by humans and humans look and act differently depending on culture and family, nevertheless, we are all human.

Aracella said, she realized to be involved with and teach students about the Holocaust was her “spiritual calling” (Interview with Aracella) and this is related to her view of the human race as spiritually interconnected. With regard to spirituality in general, she related a story during which she was studying and writing curriculum and learning about Adolf Eichmann and his role



in history and in the emergence of Holocaust education. She was asked to present her group's curriculum and explain it. As she did so, she knew inside herself that this was special, significant, and instrumental to her teaching life. She says this space that opened up for her extends into her life in general, because she can address issues of equity, racism, and answer questions others have as to the relevance of Holocaust in general. In addition, she maintains an active presence on her city's area Holocaust education committee. She thinks the general public needs to understand the importance of Holocaust education, as it is a relevant topic to present-day events (e.g., encouraging acquaintances and friends to vote for candidates who support equity in society). She states emphatically that she uses her voice to bring the issues of humanity and respect into conversations whenever possible. Aracella thinks that in addition to classroom work, teachers must share the deeper message of acceptance and benevolence within our shared humanity beyond our classroom walls by speaking about equity and the need to preserve public education. When asked, she answers friends and others' questions concerning how she is voting in an election. She believes keeping open dialogue is an essential step in preserving our first amendment rights.

Sheldon shared his concern that some of the students attending his classes at the private Christian school in which he teaches do not "understand that the world includes others beyond people who look like them and believe as they do." Due to the lack of racial diversity in the school, he has chosen to spend time directly instructing his students about their stereotypical view of the world, before he begins his semester teaching the Shoah. His direct instruction includes sentence starters that require students to write down known stereotypes with the intention of identifying their own. Additionally, he uses current events and pictures of actual people and asks his students to determine if these children are Christians. Often students are

flummoxed to discover the white children in the picture are Bosniaks (Muslims from Bosnia). He attempts to expand his students' narrow view of the world and to help them understand that their own prejudice minimizes other humans and prevents their deeper development. This is difficult work as he attempts to teach his students who are not yet reflective and they seem to lack the ability to dialogue; however, he does not give up. He states that he has a wider view of people and does not espouse to the narrow thinking of most of his students, their parents, and in some cases those in the administration of the school. Rather, he feels his beliefs and understanding makes room for others and supports his teaching of the Shoah as one that must include a deeper understanding of relationship between human beings. Participants are able to tell and share Holocaust stories with students because they have experienced struggle for themselves and realize that what the Holocaust tried to do in creating strangers through labeling and isolation is what Holocaust education must not do. As Holocaust teachers, we must seek to include, understand, and welcome the other, because of a deep commitment to our shared humanity.

### **Humility in Attitude and Action**

The participants show the notions of love and acceptance in their pedagogical actions, rooted in love and empathy, tied to the teacher's acceptance of difficulty in their personal, historical life, and within human experiences. The actions of the teacher can be seen through the notions of Nagler's (2004) Power-Love and Heart unity, and integrative power. This attitude of love is connected to the previous sections of spirituality and recognizing the humanity of all involved in the Holocaust and in the students we seek to teach. Therefore, this type of love, *agape* as some have said (Nagler, 2004) is not transactional, as I will address in the following paragraphs. Frequently, in teaching, we are inspired by our students. We receive inspiration when students are learning and they give us their feedback. In addition, however, the

commitment demonstrated by these teachers, appears to be in spite of or in addition to positive feedback; they continue on. In some cases they realize that learning takes a long time, and it may be after the initial time spent with students that they begin to fully understand all of what they have learned. Power-based love and spirituality are key to participants' commitment through years of teaching.

### *Power-based love*

The concept of power-based love is a foundational notion to the Gandhi's definition (Nagler, 2004). Nagler states power can be obtained by acts of love (2004). Considering this definition of love, which is not transactional but is relational, respectful, and open. It assists teachers in building appropriate classroom relationships especially when students are allowed to share voicing their opinions and feelings, and are given time for reflection and connections. In order for the teacher to extend this kind of love, Fowler (2006) reminds that humility must be present. When it is, students have the opportunity to learn deep lessons about human relationships. Fowler (2006) states when teachers introduce difficulty, they are also interpreting these meanings to and with students. This unraveling of meaning is complex, varied, and culturally unclear; therefore, the teacher must share this opportunity with students so the teachers themselves have the opportunity of also practicing making meaning. This is an unselfish act shared in generosity between students and teachers, and one of mutual respect (Nagler, 2004). As scholars and teachers, we must remember that most of what we do is a result from our own scholarship and so there is a sense of rightness in what and how we teach. In other words, we think we know.

Not everything we think we know is in question (i.e., WWII is an event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century); however, even in history, there is much interpretation. It is clear that in order for the pedagogical space to become dynamic, it must be open to dialogue and shared ideas. For example, the teacher is prepared to teach, has studied the topic and is familiar with content. Yet, when relating difficult knowledge to students, their thoughts, ideas, and feelings should be welcomed and developed as relationship building with content and the humanity of the topic. In some cases, student sharing sounds negative as they may share that they feel discomfort and are upset. As Carman stated, she wants students to have an emotional response to Holocaust information because there is no other acceptable response to the suffering and unfathomable cruelty, but she does not dictate students' responses. There are questions that have not yet been asked and answered and this uncomfortable presence is part of teaching and learning. Knowing this, we can accept the realization that pedagogy is for students and must include them as complex beings needing instruction and encouragement when learning how to incorporate critical thinking skills.

We must approach our students prepared through study, yet open to the unknown of what happens in learning, realizing that those we teach also experience "the sense of common fate, from suffering, a common comfortlessness" (Fowler, 2006, p. 137). Fowler (2006) reminds that humility and hermeneutic interpretation combine in "a deep relational lesson in compassion" (p. 137). The notion of Aoki's (2005) openness to possibility and a general acceptance of what it means to be human (Williams, 2001) bolster teachers' ability to interact with students through humility. Humility in teaching and within learning adds to rich meaning-making and feeds engagement for teachers and students, which in turn supplies the continued ability to remain committed.

### *Heart unity*

Heart unity is intertwined with relationality as mentioned above, however when discussing nonviolence and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Nagler (2004) introduces the notion of heart unity and its significance to teaching because it deals with mutual respect for all humans:

Heart unity, the empathetic desire for the welfare of others, could also be called “rejoicing in diversity.” We are one in our underlying consciousness, which has no divisions. In practice I get in touch with the unity when I want you to be fulfilled in the way you can be fulfilled—not necessarily the way I’d be fulfilled. That we can and should both be fulfilled is a cardinal principle of faith in the world of Satyagraha (holding onto truth); that we have different ways of getting there is equally cardinal. Unity of aspiration. Down there in the heart, goes with diversity of attributes, of individuality on the surface (p. 270).

It is possible then to hold my truth, respect yours and have the right for both to exist in a balanced way, without violence to either party. Most participants, as discussed in other parts of this chapter demonstrate a respect for themselves, the curriculum, and for students. They also understand that beyond direct instruction, students have a need to feel safe in the classroom environment, have voices in conversations, be able to test their ideas, and to have the best expected from them. This understanding and demonstration of it is integrative power in action.

### *Integrative Power in Empathy*

Once the teacher establishes mutual respect in their teaching between themselves and students through power-love and heart unity, they can practice a type of power sharing that is mutually satisfying. Nagler’s (2004) notion of power and love is integrative and builds human empathy, deepening meaning with regard to any curriculum issue or content topic. That is to say,

if a person can identify with human condition, experience, or relationship, understanding and relevance can be deepened. Nagler (2004) discusses Kenneth Boulding's theory called *The Three Faces of Power*. Nagler (2004) states:

He called them: *Threat power*, ("Do something I want or I'll do something you don't want"); *Exchange power*, ("Give me something I want and I'll give you something you want"); and *integrative power*, (which I would paraphrase as "I'm going to do what I believe is right, something, something authentic, and we will end up closer") (p. 29).

When power is integrated, humans can bond, enjoy freedom and make meaning, which informs their own sense of purpose (Nagler, 2004). Education becomes purposeful, meaningful, integral, and relevant when a teacher is willing to practice integrative power; that is to say the teacher does what he or she feels is right to do in an effort to bring students closer to a higher ethic of treating others with respect. This does much to anchor the teacher in teaching. For example, Nanci uses her own experiences with isolation and determines to be empathetic with her students. She said she believes that because she was different growing up, she has learned to accept difference. She uses this same understanding when teaching about the Holocaust. She states, "Then difference, of course to other people, is sometimes a very frightening thing. Of course then that [labeling] allows them to do things that they normally would not."

Later when discussing her artifact, her students' work on a class project, she remarks that "I want them to be empathetic and sympathetic, and morally courageous. Don't be so quick to blame or judge. Not everyone has it as good as you" (Interview with Nanci). She aspires to help all students understand what scapegoating is and how dehumanization continues currently by asking them to examine themselves and their everyday choices. Her own experience and

understanding of this type of human experience makes the Holocaust relevant for her and she then can deepen the experience for her students and widen the possibility that they will understand and find relevant the experience of others as important to their understanding. In teaching the project, she asks them to write critically, using historical facts taught in class, and to incorporate their learning into personal reflection they share out with the class.

Bea personally empathizes with her students, who are in crisis. She is sensitive to them, in light of her own experiences, and it is her practice to be compassionate toward them. Bea shows empathy through her sensitivity to all students, but especially to those who are suffering or in crisis. She is careful to not assume students are bad when they first exhibit unusual behavior. Rather, she observes and asks questions, listening and knowing when students are ready to move on to the next carefully planned curriculum piece. Having spent time studying at Holocaust seminars in the U.S. and abroad, she then gets to know her students. She masterfully weaves curriculum to connect students with the rigor of Holocaust content in such a way that these students will be challenged to think critically. Not being fully satisfied, each year Bea reevaluates her course. She builds their skills, their questioning techniques, their interest, and the rigor of the course that appropriately challenges the quality of their work. Concern for her students as people and learners reminds me of Nagler's (2004) comments to "peer into the depths of human nature – of ourselves in a balanced way, seeing what is good as well as what is discouraging about us" (p. 5). Through self-examination, teachers improve their teaching and deepen their commitment to Holocaust education,

### **Threads on the Underside**

Not all participants demonstrated integrative power as mentioned above; however, this may indicate that I did not see evidence in the data. For example, Sheldon mentions how one of

his students gave him feedback about her growing love of history because she is learning from him. Basically, she was using an antique typewriter and felt that she understood how this technology was important in the timeline of history and she credited the teacher. But upon further questioning, he does not share that he values any feedback from his current students concerning the themes of Holocaust education that he seems to surface when talking about his own written curriculum and his artifact. He speaks a great deal about his pictures taken from his overseas trips (e.g., to Auschwitz) and how he has shared some of the pictures with his students. He shrugs when I ask about their responses to learning or to the intense subjects he introduces. He says he does not trust students' immediate feedback, and would rather wait five years to discover what his students learned or retained. However, he does not have that feedback either. I cannot discover, uncover, or understand what he thinks about his relationship with his students. He alludes to his students in large overarching statements; despite how open-ended or specific my questions seem to be.

I do not suggest the teacher is intentionally avoiding my questions, but perhaps truly unable to answer them, as though he does not see the unanswered part of questions as significant. It remains in his blindside (Green, 2010), an area where others can see things of which the individual is unaware. Could this be an area of further exploration to invite a new level of awareness for teachers? Another possibility would be to analyze the school situation in which the teacher is situated and to study gendered-responses. Yet again, it is important to remember that in using a hermeneutic framework, I seek to understand, and to see what the participant will share, fully understanding the participants' words and intended meaning. In this area, the teacher's meaning was opaque to me. I wonder: Do we, as instructors, understand how students receive our teaching or process student learning in the midst of teaching? How can we know



what we have indeed taught or what students have learned? Perhaps, students have not learned deeply enough nor internalized the message for themselves, and if that is the case: How do we instruct differently? In a relational sense, the teacher would adjust his or her teaching if this area of opaqueness could become a source of enlightenment so students can grow.

I tie the warp threads here to preserve the significance of the analysis. At another time and with other research questions, I may untie them and begin the artful weaving that should and will continue as other teachers continue to teach about the Holocaust and possibly find new and different pedagogy to deeply connect with students. Meaning making through commitment and experience will continue to unite Holocaust educators who seek to teach from this, in this way. Mere understanding of suffering will never justify the Holocaust or the teaching of it. Yet, as this dissertation has shown, we as educators must come to understand that our own lives, experiences, and stories add richness and texture to our teaching and a depth without which relationships with content and students cannot be built. Our ability to be committed to difficult knowledge rests on the fabric of meaning making, deeply connected to our humanity. It is from this place, that we can teach our students to value their contributions to life and despite the horror of the Holocaust; we together are able to continue telling the story.

### Summary

The Holocaust educator is the focus of this chapter. Their willingness to remain open to their painful experiences has led to what Williams (2001) calls the seeds of healing. The human condition is complex and fraught with difficulty. Participants continue to care of the self and through nonviolent action they remain at the site of meaning making and teach their students from this place. Participants demonstrate interconnectedness to themselves, Holocaust content,

and student centered pedagogy in order that they will make meanings as they also relate to others and the curricula of content and experiences.

Teachers are vital to Holocaust education and their experiences and stories are integral to the understanding of teaching in general and to the Holocaust teacher's experience and engagement. Understanding these intricacies can bring greater awareness to sustained teacher engagement. During sustained engagement, teachers build their capacity to understand and teach complex Holocaust content and discover teaching methods that assist their students' understanding. We can learn to find joy in and through difficulty and to incorporate this language to describe our teaching experiences as Holocaust teachers. We recognize that there is value we place in our own intertwined lives with content, history, and students, the next generation of storytellers.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Holocaust education is significant knowledge for students because it potentially opens up critical dialogue concerning racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism, to name a few, and is instrumental in creating people who are well-informed citizens. Horowitz (2009) states that a post-survivor generation, which includes teachers, has much to contribute to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Therefore, while the subject matter is difficult to teach, the experienced Holocaust teacher chooses to learn and teach about it. Additionally, there are many studies addressing teacher stories, but few study Holocaust educators and their life stories, which influence their teaching, thus there was a need for this study.

The purpose of my study was to understand what is behind teachers' commitment to learn and teach Holocaust education and to explore their pedagogical approaches. This study explored, retold, and analyzed the stories of seven experienced Holocaust teachers. In this final chapter, I addressed the research questions and further explain the implications of this study on teachers and educators. I explored limitations of the study, possible further research and researcher reflections. I begin first with a brief summary of this dissertation.

## Summary of the Research

In this research, I planned to study four to eight experienced Holocaust educators and understand how their life and teaching experiences affect their commitment to teaching information related to the Shoah. I recruited seven experienced Holocaust teachers' participants who agreed to be interviewed and to provide other data according to my methodology.

I selected hermeneutic inquiry through a Gadamerian lens (1989) as the theoretical frame because it utilizes the notion that knowing can happen through understanding words and interpretation happens between the interpreter and that which is interpreted. As researcher, I engaged with text, teachers' words, and gained meaning and knowing with this engagement. An important tenant of interpretation in research is what Gadamer refers to as *prejudice*, the notion meaning every interpreter brings thoughts, ideas, and beliefs to the interpretation. When faced with new ideas not yet understood, an opportunity exists to feel or think negatively, however, accepting this notion as part of interpretation can open one to new realities and deeper understanding not seen before or new to the situation that is being explored.

Gadamer (1989) refers to this understanding as a *horizon*, an interpretation that involves the interpreter and what is being interpreted. Gadamer (1989) states the hermeneutic experience happens when I as the researcher, understand the concept of prejudice (p. 283) and am open to the transformative possibilities of new interpretations, co-constructed with that being interpreted. Then when anticipations are shattered, that is to say the interpreter's pre-thinking or ideas about the subject that one brings to the site of knowing, then meaning is made and understood. As a researcher, I interacted with the participants multiple times through one-on-one interviews, reading their transcripts, writings, and information about their artifacts. I asked interview questions of each participant, included in the appendix, and added additional questions and

reworded others after initially asking them to gain greater clarity of the participants' intended meaning. Understanding requires dialogue between the text and the interpreter. In my study, the dialogue between researcher and teacher was integral to collecting and understanding text, the teachers themselves, and further analyzing data increased the study's significance. The fundamental notions of Gadamerian hermeneutics matched well with narrative inquiry as methodology because the emphasis was on understanding. Through this back and forth dialogue, responsible collection and analysis of participants' words revealed their meaning and who they were within their own history. They talked about their life within the temporality of their existence, revealing the people or sociality of the occurrence, and place they refer to in their telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I analyzed their words to obtain meaning and practice what Erlandson, et al. (1993) call the hermeneutic dialectic. This means within the dialogue, there is a constant search for meaning.

In the literature review, I explored a selected history after World War II (WWII) that led up to the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Since I referred to Holocaust educators, I explained important events that lead up to teaching about the Holocaust in the U.S., which created what we think of as Holocaust education. Following the end of WWII, survivors continued living a traumatized life in displaced persons camps and were not yet giving testimony to their experiences. At the time of liberation, the U.S. armed forces did much to memorialize war atrocities through interviews, pictures, and films documenting survivor eyewitness accounts.

After the Holocaust of 1933-45, referred to as the *Shoah*, and after liberation at the end of WWII, survivors began to share their experiences. One survivor, the late Elie Wiesel, himself a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, rose to scholarly prominence in the U.S. and became the

first chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. He was instrumental in bringing the topic of the Holocaust into the public sphere. Additionally, in 1960, Adolf Eichmann was brought to trial. His prosecution further illuminated the significant suffering the Nazi's inflicted on their victims and gave credence to survivor testimony of atrocities. To support preserving survivor stories, U.S. President Jimmy Carter established the President's Commission on the Holocaust. One of the commission's main outcomes was the creation of the USHMM. The idea is that it is not only a museum, but also an educational foundation, and a commission on conscience that keeps awareness to worldwide issues of persecution. It is the largest repository in the U.S. for Holocaust-related artifacts, literature, film, and video, which are important resources for educational purposes.

Horowitz (2009) states there are four stages in studying the Holocaust. The first includes studying the events; the second is the historical and journalistic state in which memoirs and survivor literature came to be; third is the birth of analytical research that began after 1960; and the fourth and present state includes the first three and moves Holocaust understanding through discourse into an ethical understanding in which the study of human beings is paramount. The fourth stage is extremely important because Holocaust survivors are nearing the end of their lives and teachers and second-generation survivors are significant to continuing Holocaust education in keeping memory alive. Additionally, other catastrophes can be discussed through the atrocity of the Shoah and the lens of unparalleled suffering and cruelty not seen before in modern times.

I concluded the literature review with pedagogy within Holocaust education because it is important to teaching and to this topic. I gave examples and rationales for different methods especially as suggested by the USHMM. I underscored the need for guidelines; the USHMM

suggests 14 listed in chapter two of this dissertation. The teacher should accurately define the Shoah, using the official definition, and explain and teach necessary vocabulary.

The sampling for this study is purposeful. I recruited participants after I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I met and spoke to the director of education at our local Jewish Federation and explained my study. After I created a screening questionnaire (see Appendix A), the director sent it to everyone on the database of teachers, and I received some responses. Teachers listed on this database have at one time shown interest or been involved in training. After determining which teachers had at least five years of actual Holocaust teaching experience, I spoke to each one by telephone. Seven of the respondents met the criteria of my study. I met with each of the seven teachers in person to discuss my study and obtained consent from each participant, after which I collected data to answer the research questions.

The main research question of this dissertation is:

How do experienced secondary teacher's narratives reveal the influence of their life experiences on their commitments and approaches in Holocaust education?

Sub-Question 1: How do the participants' life experiences explain their commitment to Holocaust education?

Sub-Question 2: How do the participants' lives and previous teaching experience shift their pedagogical approaches in the classroom?

Sub-Question 3: What does it mean to be a Holocaust educator?

To collect data for answering these questions, I established an interview schedule for each participant, careful to give enough time for his or her own writing and selection of an artifact. I collected and used three data sources from each participant: three interviews per person, an

artifact of their choice, and two writing responses to general questions about the teacher's background and to teaching in general (see detailed question in Appendix B).

After collecting data I retold each of the seven participants' stories using their data sources as the first layer of interpretation. I checked transcripts against the taped interviews and also confirmed, if possible, with my researcher journal. I used sociality, temporality, and place as I completed this retelling. Before the thematic analysis, I checked transcripts against the recorded interviews and also confirmed, if possible, with my researcher journal. I coded the data, using the computerized *NVivo* program and wrote a thematic analysis. In the following pages, I will synthesize my answers to the research questions gleaned through this study.

## **Interpretation**

### **Teachers' Narratives: Main Research Questions Answered**

My main research question is: How do experienced secondary teachers' narratives reveal the influence of their life experiences on their commitments and approaches in Holocaust education?

In this portion, I address the research questions to answer them directly and holistically. To address the main research question I asked open-ended questions about each participant's life. All participants were willing to speak about their life to varying degrees and as each of the three interviews progressed, sharing became easier and their eagerness increased to speak to each question. Participants spoke their stories situated in what Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to as temporality, sociality, and place of narration. Most participants began stories at their time in life prior to adulthood largely because I began my questioning in this order. Although I did not require it, most participants began with a childhood story. They talked about parents and siblings



as their social context and home or school as the earliest setting of place that grounded their stories.

Participants shared stories that are deeply involved and emotional. When beginning these significant stories, each participant paused and elongated their narrative frequently as references for other stories. They delved into descriptions and emotions, and despite the distance of time they had a keen sense of where they were, with whom, and when the events occurred. They readily revealed difficulty within their personal lives. They talked about significant trauma, and although there were tears, they continued on, not dismissing the story for easier ones to tell. They were willing to share hurt from incidents, which happened long ago, in some cases decades ago, and wove them into the present because they retold parts of the same story in other parts or in different interviews. They shifted the temporality from past into present because the stories hold relevance in who they are today because of what they have experienced. Although the trauma is negative, the ability to hold together through the wounding-experience is creative. Acceptance of the wound emboldened these participants with a deeper sense of humanity.

These teachers deeply identified their lived-experience as influential to how they teach in relation to students. Their classroom practice included acceptance and the difficult curriculum of lived-experience and classroom practice. Most participants explained the trauma in great detail and returned to talk about how like that time, they learned through it and in spite of it to live with it. Their commitment to teaching and learning came from this acceptance. Several participants explained how the trauma of painful childhood experience is significant because as these events happened, they were able to weave them into their lives, rather than reject or deny the pain.

Seeing themselves as learners, they are committed to studying literature and history. When the opportunity to engage with the Holocaust happened, participants were willing to

embrace its study because they understood that difficulty is part of life. Some participants were motivated by their lack of knowledge when they were asked to teach topics (i.e., *Anne Frank*) and immediately chose to learn. Other participants are students of history and were naturally exposed to Holocaust information. Participants began to research, travel, and to add to their knowledge base. As they did so, each one explored and was given more opportunities or junctures to learn additional information and to hear different stories that in turn opened up more opportunities for further study. For example, Bea and Carman started teaching *Anne Frank*, but felt limited by their lack of knowledge and so they began seeking other opportunities to study. Other participants have contacts with people who open opportunities for them. For example, Sheldon grew up in a largely Jewish community and he was invited into the homes of people who understood the Holocaust firsthand. Aracella befriended a woman who was a survivor and through their friendship, she learned a firsthand account of the Holocaust. She created a class for students and wrote her Holocaust curriculum, using USHMM documents. As educators, they knew that study and learning has opened connections for further scholarship, built upon what they already knew because this is how deep learning and connections to content are built, one layer upon the next.

Participants' language reflected integration and interconnection, rather than resistance and blame, and they spoke of openness to learning new curriculum and to teaching it. One participant explained that due to the type of trauma she endured, she blamed herself and wrestled with grief and doubt, but she never doubted her reality in favor of others who denied hers. This showed acceptance of self and of others at a deep level. Thus, like dealing with Holocaust trauma these participants worked within complex emotions and actions and told Holocaust events and narration to their students. Their understanding from which they teach has roots in acceptance of

what is difficult. Most participants explained that education was significant to their family, study was supported by strong work ethic, and they were expected to do their best in school.

*Sub-Question 1:*

How do the participants' life experiences explain their commitment to Holocaust education?

All participants spoke of teaching and learning about the Holocaust as significant knowledge for themselves and their students. All participants had an opportunity to engage with the topic earlier on in their careers. Most explained that because they are learners, they took advantage of opportunities and the commitment and engagement took hold from there. One participant grew up in a largely Jewish city and attended school with a large Jewish population. His opening to Holocaust education was through sociality and place. All participants have at one time, early on, taught the novel *Anne Frank* in English class or taught WWII history of which the Holocaust is a part. As students asked questions and inquired, participants explained that their desire to know and to discuss heightened and they realized they needed to know more to facilitate students' growth. In other words, several teachers have taught the novel *Anne Frank* and count this as the beginning of their Holocaust education journey because of the lack of knowledge teaching revealed. One participant in particular could not answer student questions, decided to travel to Washington, D.C., and sought the best training opportunities at the USHMM.

The study participants are voracious learners; writing grants to travel and study, and regularly reading, attending seminars, conferences, presentations, and presenting. They committed to decades of teaching and learning about the Holocaust because they think and believe it is important knowledge. In addition to deep understanding that Holocaust history is complex, these teachers also identified with the human experience stories that included the

suffering of victims. The participants connected, but were not emotionally overcome by the circumstances of the Holocaust. Rather, each found the history intriguing and the stories of victims unforgettable because the participants understood that suffering is part of life and many of them have experienced or witnessed and accepted their own suffering. Through their commitment to learning, they discovered the roles people played, such as bystander, perpetrator, victim, and collaborator and were determined their students should know this history and the personal stories of survivors. They desired for their students to play none of these roles in their lives, but rather to do the opposite, which is to learn about history, and care about the other, so as to support those who are bullied in their present world.

Experienced Holocaust educators engage with others' stories. They are able to understand these stories in the temporal and social frame of WWII. They have studied the notions of isolation, nativism, and eugenics, to name a few, as ideas espoused in global societies, not only in a well-developed and advanced Germany. Therefore, through study of narrative and historical information, they equipped their teaching with the highest level of knowing through training from national conferences and at USHMM.

These teachers were familiar with USHMM teaching guidelines and pedagogical suggestions. Through our interviews they spoke about their own agency in deciding topics and methods to be taught during the time allowed. One participant taught, using Holocaust stories and literature for the entire year, weaving in all strands of English/Language Arts. Others developed semester classes. Others, in response to the demands of the present testing culture and the pressure to teach only a prescribed curriculum, have whittled their units to two weeks. Yet, they resist the urge to forgo teaching about the Holocaust in favor of planning a modified unit so that students will have their opportunity to learn. Teachers grew in their ability to teach this

difficult subject because they remain committed to learning and teaching in general, and specifically to Holocaust education. On a personal level, they were loyal to the notion of growth. This means they realized that people change and transformation was possible through acceptance of others and that life itself is wrought with difficulty, pain, and unpleasantness. They avoided remaining in negative emotion through nonviolence acts (Nagler, 2004) that I described as acceptance and care of the self (Foucault, 1988). Willingness to do so prepared them to teach this difficult subject because they can balance their outlook by incorporating difficulty as part of life. They can observe a relational space with content and students and accept the difficulty that often accompanies dynamic tension.

Because of participants' ability to navigate and overcome difficulty, they have the capacity to continue to commit to learning and teaching. Education and learning, understanding history and the context of the Holocaust are important to all participants. They sought out additional learning opportunities. They belong to organizations that promote Holocaust education and because the participants are teachers; education and learning, reading and understanding the historical context of the Holocaust is very important.

### *Sub-Question 2:*

How do the participant's lives and previous teaching experiences shift their pedagogical approaches in the classroom?

It was significant to note that my participants are people who have experienced some type of wounding or trauma and integrated this life experience into their lives. They were willing to talk about it in various parts of our interview and were willing to dialogue, answering questions to clarify their meaning. Participants talked about themselves as committed learners and teachers. Through their explanations, they demonstrated that they were willing to learn, read, and remain

current with different aspects of Holocaust education. They understood that Holocaust education is complex content and learning because it is deeply rooted in emotion, history, stories, and people's lives around prejudice, survival, and ongoing suffering. These participants understood that emotional and physical trauma and the ugliness of dealing with and living with the aftermath required living with awareness and openness to possibilities, and they were also open to difficult relationships with curriculum content and with people.

The participants did not speak of sudden, abrupt epiphanic experiences that drastically change their teaching style. Rather, each one spoke about a period of time during which they learned the basics of teaching. Afterward, they changed their pedagogy gradually, incorporated through learning over a time period and trusted their growth. This awareness of productive struggle, made possible through a nonviolent acceptance of the self, is similar to the antecedent state that precedes an epiphany. The shift in teachers' methodology in delivering content was gradual and steady, requiring a longer cultivation with teaching and learning of Holocaust education. Therefore the ability and commitment of the teacher to stay with difficulty is significant so that the deep integration of the mind in learning with self and with others with regard to Holocaust education could take hold. Each teacher was in fluid motion, experiencing resistance, while learning about this difficult subject. While doing so, they weaved weft and warp threads into a tapestry of life that allowed them to make sense of historical and personal trauma. Then after multiple times of learning, and listening to other expert teachers in learning environments, the participants said they emerged as more able practitioners, describing their teaching as that which avoids trivialization as a result of their intense study. They explored, for example, the definitions of words significant to understanding the Holocaust (i.e., the study alone of the word anti-Semitism, requires an increased level of scholarship for students). These

teachers help students understand the idea of pogroms (e.g., targeted persecution of specific groups of people, similar to Jews).

To understand anti-Semitism one may see that while people have suffered at the hands of others in power, the Jews have suffered for centuries. Targeting one group or another is not new torture, and continues in the recent past. For example, the conflict between Bosnian Serbs, and Bosniaks and Croats on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe of Bosnia and Herzegovina that occurred from 1992 to 1995. Additionally, violence between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority in the East African country of Rwanda continues. U.S. society in 2019 saw political parties wrestle about building a physical wall at the border between Mexico and the U.S. Participants in this study avoided over-generalizing acts of war within the Holocaust-related content they delivered to their students by building relationships through the content each instructor holds dear. Also, by utilizing content with which they are intimately involved most teachers were ultimately able to convey the complexity of history and current events to their students. Participants discussed the importance of empathy for their students and for others in class, in their schools, and then in the world. These choices were sound pedagogical choices and a result of relationship the teacher built between the curriculum, the students, and themselves and helped students to grow morally and intellectually.

The shift of pedagogical approaches also happens within the context of learning. They employed student-led learning by giving students a large amount of Holocaust information they have learned themselves first, and then they shifted learning to students to support and advise student learning. For example, Bea taught a variety of Holocaust topics that incorporated all strands of English curriculum (reading, writing speaking, spelling and viewing). At first, students were heavily reliant on her direct instruction that included historical facts, poetry, literature, and

personal stories. As the year progressed, students became more interested in the content and built cognitive muscle with which to deal with complex issues as the teacher shifted the instruction to supportive and advisory. Toward the end of the year, and after several novel studies, grammar lessons, film and picture analysis, writing and reading and preparing for state exams, students were asked to create a project, based on research and historically accurate facts, incorporating their own reflection and art responses. The teacher advised the students on refining their ideas and on how to do excellent work through guidelines; however, she did not dictate the outcome of the project. Aracella stated that when she first began teaching students about the Holocaust, she did all the teaching and directly instructed their outcomes. Later as her knowledge and confidence grew, she allowed students to choose any method including their own historical fiction narratives, as long as they were accurate to history. Teachers balanced the difficulty of Holocaust content by carefully curating their teaching materials so as not to lead students to believe Holocaust education somehow has an uplifting narrative of *happy endings* (positive outcomes for survivors) and used recommended reputable curriculum sources, similar to those from USHMM.

Not all teachers encouraged student-centered learning. In one incidence, a participant shared that he used only movies (films and videos) to teach Holocaust content. Although students were allowed to respond in writing, the teacher did not discuss his growth or share the overall thematic content of his students' response. Therefore, some teachers were aware of their pedagogical abilities and purposed to include students' voice in the classroom and made room for student feedback. While for others, they did not seem to make much effort to teach in this way nor was this explained in interview sessions. Another teacher stated he did not trust the scope of student feedback immediately after being exposed to Holocaust subject matter. But, he



would like to invite feedback from his students many years after they left his classroom and then evaluate their thoughts. It is true that education has long-term impact, however, he did not discuss whether or not he received any feedback after the student had left his classroom. The teacher offered no other look into his practice other than direct instruction. No participant explicitly discussed blogging or social media aspect of pedagogical strategies.

### *Sub-Question 3:*

What does it mean to be a Holocaust educator?

Some teachers answered this question directly, while others alluded to the aspects I will discuss next. Based on the narration of these participants, I summarize that being a Holocaust educator means working through the teacher's own struggles in life, answering a spiritual calling, and creating dynamic pedagogical spaces for students to learn so that teaching and learning difficult knowledge can be sustained. Dealing nonviolently with the tension of struggle and remaining open to learn from difficulty are important for these educators to engage Holocaust education and create a learning space for students. Spiritual calling and recognizing the interconnection of self to others and to content also is important to how teachers see and engaged their students pedagogically.

These experienced Holocaust teachers have experienced wounding and traumas in their life experiences and remain open to learning and teaching painful history. Because they could recognize this as part of our shared human story and accept this tension, they can teach Holocaust education. They have chosen to prioritize Holocaust content and learning in their lives and are eager to teach. They have spent much time reading, researching, and traveling to learn from scholars and to significant places to obtain Holocaust knowledge (i.e., Washington D.C., Israel, Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic). They cared about presenting students with

accurate historical information and cared about their students' involved learning. They dedicated themselves to being able to dialogue with students and to determining how students can grasp the complexity of this difficult subject matter. To this end, most were willing to change their teaching methods to be more inclusive.

Participants exhibited a sense of spiritual calling. They were aware of learning about the Holocaust as important for themselves and a subject that must be taught to students. They were aware that learning involved a dynamic tension that is not easy to define and therefore they had a sense of humility that what emerged from learning is not always a planned result. They did and do remain open. I have used the word *ecumenical* to explain the disposition exhibited by my participants. They understand that humans are complex, but share humanity beyond nationality and race. They were willing to embrace the humanness of people in general and share this outlook with their students as they made connections to broader historical content. This act of openness and connection helped students to create relevance between Shoah history and current events that also mimic the prejudice and horror of the Holocaust in this present time period.

Relationships with others and content is important to participants' learning and life. They practiced *power-based love* (Nagler, 2004), a notion that promoted sharing classroom power with students rather than one that is hierarchical. This type of power allowed appropriate relationship building that I described as integration rather than transactional (this for that). Participants practiced methods that I have called nonviolent within their relationships with themselves and with others and the power sharing as mentioned above fits within the nonviolent lens of *heart unity* (Nagler, 2004) because participants desired for the welfare of others. They recognized and appreciated differences within their classroom and made allowances for students who do not conform to the participants' way of viewing the world. Despite differences, they continued to

teach all students because they believed and respected that deep down in every person lays the humanity of a living being that deserved the opportunity to understand deeply. It is what is deep that is meaningful and therefore, my participants press on through uncomfortable teaching situations in the hope of reaching the joy of communicating their content and building appropriate connections with students. They cultivated deep learning with difficult and emotional content because all humans can relate to pain and joy, freedom and fear. Therefore, participants' students have a power to relate to themselves and others and participants seek to tap into this reservoir. Participants practiced care for themselves and were able to balance their life's difficulty with a healthy boundary, or personal limits, so as not to be destroyed or overcome by their own suffering. Through this and because of their acceptance, they were able to engage with difficult subjects and curriculum because they understood that difficulty is part of their humanity and that of their students. They studied consistently and read books related to Holocaust topics. Their study built bridges with content, curriculum, people and themselves. They accepted that history is made up of humans and human stories in context. These stories were full of complexity, without easy simplistic answers or feelings. Through consistency and willingness to practice teaching and learning nonviolently, they built a dynamic pedagogical relationship with and between students and Holocaust-related issues, such as bigotry, hate, bullying, and encouraged inclusion. This practice was transformative because through their teaching, they inspired and assisted students and others to learn and see connections of Holocaust related themes, making them more aware, caring, and responsive individuals to others around them.

The participants remained engaged in classroom work and grew in their abilities to teach students with patience, kindness, and rigor, while accepting students' varied experience and abilities. Each person was able to teach others about life in a relational way and engage with

people through emotional connection. Teaching with varied approaches, and concern for relevance, was the focus of the teacher who sought to help their students grow in their ability to see and experience connections to content and see the interconnections in ideas that encompass others. Since this important teaching will continue through the work of teachers, we must build nonviolent relationships with the self, with others, and with content to understand how the acceptance of all human experience is influential to how we make meaning in the world.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study are considerable for the continuance of Holocaust education and to support teachers who choose to teach the subject matter. Firstly, teachers will be encouraged that their own life story and experiences are important to deepening their own learning and teaching capacity. Advisers and teacher-educators should encourage their pre-service and in-service teachers to connect with curriculum as lived experience within, but not limited to a Gadamerian frame of knowing that includes the prejudice we each bring to the site of meaning making. In so doing, teachers can grapple with who they are and the meaning within their lives that can create transformational spaces for internal change involving teaching and learning for and with their students. Learning to teach is not just learning de-contextualized skills, but interwoven with the teachers themselves. This study acknowledges that acceptance of struggle and wounding, as I have called life's difficult experiences, can serve teaching Holocaust education. Those who have chosen to accept their experiences have the ability to also engage the most difficult emotional content and teach in such a way that students are not traumatized, but engaged in rich curriculum. This study also underscored that participants have a deep sense of respect for themselves, the historical content, the lives of Holocaust victims and rescuers, and for each of their students. Teachers can be challenged to think about and reflect on their pedagogy,

so they can include and grow their students with the idea that they will be the next storytellers of the Holocaust.

Secondly, administrators and school leaders can and should create conditions that open opportunities for teachers to develop themselves initially and continually. Teacher development and teacher commitment are integrated. Learning and teaching creates rich and balanced curriculum and gives teachers and also their students the opportunity to learn and experience deeply. In other words, most participants were committed to studying, reading, and planning curriculum implementation with their students in mind. Therefore, although the content can be extremely emotional, these participants balanced the expectation of interacting with knowledge and history with personal narrative. Anticipating that it will be emotional, participants planned lessons and implemented with growing engagement strategies. One can see how this content could leave students devastated and unable to deal. These participants created a holistic way to teach and did so with multiple learning opportunities, incorporating themselves and accepted facts from scholars and experts while carefully dealing with their students' awareness. This study can help school leaders to be open-minded in their support of teachers. They should provide more opportunities for teachers to travel and learn from other teachers at the national level.

Thirdly, in planning for teachers' professional development, we can encourage experienced Holocaust educators to engage more fully by examining their lives and using this connection to promote their growth and mentorship of new Holocaust educators. We can affirm all teachers as they grapple with the intensity of the subject. Teachers should be challenged to constantly reflect on their learning, themselves, and how they think about content and students. They should be encouraged to make connections in a dynamic pedagogical way that includes the

care of the self and nonviolence because this increases their practice and assists their growth as human beings involved in complex work.

We can understand and accept that not all teachers will choose to commit as deeply as those in this study because commitment and respect is built over years of teaching and this cannot be regulated or mandated. In other words, teachers must come to the level of commitment exemplified by my participants because of their choices, and not by extrinsic force by administration or law. Having said this, professors and instructional planners may consider teaching Holocaust content to pre-service teachers to open conversations and deepen learning with regard to social justice, cultural diversity, and the importance of teachers' stories in teaching and connecting content with students. There will be those who feel the call to teach and be committed to Holocaust education and some will not. Most importantly, this study can inspire those teachers to embrace difficult knowledge with heart and fortitude that they have from their life experiences, because it is this deeper emotional context that will help them maintain long-term relationships with difficult content. Once, they understand the relationships with themselves and their students, teaching difficult content can become transformational and full of possibility for themselves and their students. Openness is necessary for commitment to teaching well and to developing the ability to change one's teaching, so that students are taught with respect, and encouraged to think and link with their learning.

Lastly, through this research process, teachers began to see their own connections to Holocaust education as deep and rich. Several teachers stated that they had never been asked about their teaching journey in such a way and therefore, the research process was enlightening to them, and almost therapeutic. Participants felt the warmth of the spotlight on their practice and responded in overwhelmingly positive words. I saw the commitment of each participant and the

joy they felt in teaching. Struggle in life and in engagement with difficult content resulted in giving back to the participant the joy of their own learning and teaching, and buttressed their continued commitment. Teachers should be encouraged to tell their stories after they have made meaning with difficult content. Therefore, we must care for and respect experienced teachers by listening to their woven accounts. Then another possibility is that these experienced teachers will mentor others who are interested in teaching the Shoah. Less experienced Holocaust teachers can make themselves available to more experienced teachers to develop relationships that inspire good teaching and the sharing of occurrences and impressions as a means to develop and grow as educators. Curriculum that includes an integrated reflection piece can be a part of training.

Any Holocaust education board can invite teachers to serve and these teachers have varied experience levels, thereby giving training opportunities to less experienced teachers through access to learning opportunities. More experienced teachers can model the rigor of learning; the intricacies and joy of teaching; and awareness required to teach Holocaust curriculum that opens up dynamic pedagogical ways for themselves and for students. As mentioned before, we know that the generation of survivors have aged and are all near gone. Teachers, professors, and second-generation survivors are tasked with teaching our students about the Shoah. The *how* of this task is important so that more openness and less hierarchical ways of learning will flourish. To those of us who are committed and to those still thinking about it: Let us continue to keep open the place where we can willingly hear about each others' path to commitment and learning about the Shoah and to take strength from that process as we continue to weave our own tapestries.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are the relatively small sample size, not uncommon in narrative inquiry, making the findings transferrable, but not generalizable. While teachers were interviewed to understand their connections to their life stories, I did not view their individual classrooms. I did not interview the participants' students to determine how pedagogical ideas were being taught to them, nor gain their perspectives. Narrative inquiry is interpretive and therefore, in this case co-constructive research. The limitations here are limited to the understandings of this kind of research because being in the midst of the work is simply different for everyone (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The study did not take into consideration, personality types of participants, or gender considerations, which may be responsible for why certain people answered questions the way they did or found it difficult to do so. This study had only one person of color. How would other teachers of color answer the same questions?

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

This initial study of experienced Holocaust teachers can be deepened through additionally studying Holocaust teachers and Holocaust teachers of varying ethnicities. As a woman of color myself who at times felt othered in my profession, studying how Holocaust victims were othered allowed me to better relate the concept of othering to students. Where are these teachers located? What would their answers be in understanding their connections? Locating these individuals and developing a new framework for study that includes critical race theory would be significant. In addition, the study of the students' perspectives to Holocaust education may shine the light on how the teachers' knowledge and commitment is being transferred to students. Other studies may address gender issues. What interactions and therefore,



teaching methods are preferred by a particular gender? How does this influence their learning personally and that of their students? Additionally, how or when to introduce Holocaust education to teachers in the pre-service years is another possible topic.

### **Researcher Reflections**

This dissertation demanded that I followed good research discipline and strategy. In our fast-paced information-age world, there seems little time for deep knowing that comes through conversation, yet guidance and encouragement from my professors has broadened my appreciation for these teachers' stories and the lives they lead in order to deal with and incorporate difficult content. It was the practice of looking, and looking again to find the deeper meaning that has been my task. The practice of acknowledging my biases has enriched my understanding and that of other teachers. Importantly, others' teaching practice did not "look" like my own and other teachers did not explain themselves as I would have, and this does not minimize their experience or practice. Understanding this Gadamerian definition of prejudice during this research process has allowed me to work to locate a deeper way to offer a definition of what it means to be a Holocaust teacher and to discuss how participants discuss their lives and their connections to Holocaust education. For example, a teacher may use traditional teaching methods in an open, invitational manner that will open up places for students to engage. So while, teaching methods may seem antiquated, the engagement with students and care of them is integrated and connected. I checked my biases over and over to obtain the participants' meaning and to listen holistically to all stories each told. I fought my bias to judge the teacher according to one part of their story, which would have clouded the interpretation and the analysis.

New opportunities to understand classroom interactions beyond what I have taken for granted is to see the commitment to love, acceptance, and relationship as key to retaining

commitment in Holocaust education and to education in general. The love, acceptance, and relationship aspects looks differently depending on the teacher, and the researcher must have a wide enough view, grounded in research, to find that meaning and message so that we as curriculum specialists see value in the lives and stories of teachers, different from our own that broadens one's own to find value in teachers' stories of Holocaust education and engagement.

I am changed and humbled through this research because it has been instrumental to demonstrating that these teachers and their varied experiences are significant to teaching and learning about Holocaust education and to the continuance of teaching it. Our life experiences influence our ability to deeply connect, teach, and be committed to what is difficult content for some, but necessary if we are to retain and maintain difficult knowledge in our curriculum and influence the knowing in our classrooms.

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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix A: Survey Questions Embedded in Appendix B to Determine Teachers'

#### Experience with Holocaust Education – on Google form

**[https://goo.gl/Holocaust Educator initial questions/TCiNGudhny0nKtIN2](https://goo.gl/Holocaust_Educator_initial_questions/TCiNGudhny0nKtIN2)**

Directions: Highlight the entire goggle address and it will take you to the Google form. If it does not, cut and paste the entire address into the query box. Fill out your answers to the questions and submit.

1. What kind of training have you received on the Holocaust or related topics?
2. Have you taught Holocaust studies to K-12 aged students for five (5) years or more?
3. Have you created written curriculum as a result of local or national Holocaust training?
4. Have you visited a Holocaust museum of any kind?
5. In addition to writing, what methods have you used to introduce or teach your students?

**\* This form contains the questions in the Google form and is not sent to any participant**



**Appendix B: Sample Email for Initial Recruitment via List Serve to be Accompanied by  
the Questions on Appendix A on Google form**

Dear Teacher:

I am writing to ask for your help with my research concerning experienced Holocaust educators. Please think about these questions. If your answers are in the affirmative to both and you are willing to enter into a conversation with me, please email me at: [naomikp@okstate.edu](mailto:naomikp@okstate.edu).

Please note the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board has approved this study and all protocol and ethical guidelines will be followed.

To determine whether we can work together on this research, please answer the questions on this Google form. *If the link does not work, please cut and paste the entire address into the query box. Answer the questions and submit. Please answer within two weeks of receiving this letter. I will contact you to follow up after responses are submitted.*

**[https://goo.gl/Holocaust Educator initial questions/TCiNGudhny0nKtIN2](https://goo.gl/Holocaust_Educator_initial_questions/TCiNGudhny0nKtIN2)**

Thank you,  
Naomi Kikue Poindexter  
OSU Graduate Student  
Email: [naomikp@okstate.edu](mailto:naomikp@okstate.edu)  
Phone: 918-808-7211

## Appendix C: Information Letter

Dear Participant:

I am conducting a study of Holocaust education teachers. To do this, I am writing a paper that includes narrative data to explore teachers' experience with Holocaust curriculum. My intention is to explore the teachers' life experience, Holocaust curriculum, and the teachers' understanding of what it means to be a Holocaust educator. Your views, opinions, stories, and writings are necessary to this study because of your possible experiences as a classroom teacher.

I am contacting you because you are an experienced Holocaust teacher. I am requesting permission to interview you at least three (3) times, review two (2) writing prompts and view or refer to your artifacts (e.g., items such as your lesson plans and projects). The interviews will be transcribed and your **audio will be destroyed** after my paper is completed, but I will retain the written transcript and your writings. Your transcript will depict you via a pseudonym and you will review the transcript for accuracy – a member check. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You also have a right to delete any part of the transcript that you do not want to share with the public.

The study is not meant to be overly sensitive or too emotionally taxing, yet you may withdraw at any time. Once you give permission for inclusion in this study, I will provide you with another informational letter and a consent form for permission to use your data. I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym of your choice and using only that reference in my notes and writings. You will be able to check the transcription for accuracy. I will keep the transcription in my home office, in a locked drawer. All of your data, except the written transcription will be destroyed upon the semester conclusion. I am interested in viewing artifacts and discussing your pedagogy used with students.

Please note the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board has approved this study and all protocol and ethical guidelines will be followed. If you approve your involvement, please sign the informed consent form.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 918-808-7211 or my Oklahoma State University email: [naomikp@okstate.edu](mailto:naomikp@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Naomi Kikue Poindexter  
Oklahoma State University Graduate Student

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent Form**

**Project Title: The Experienced Holocaust Teacher: Life, Curriculum, and Meaning**

**Principal Investigator:** Naomi K. Poindexter, Oklahoma State University

### **Purpose:**

The researcher will explore issues in curriculum that are instrumental in defining teaching and education. Your interview will be used to write my final paper and I will use this exploration to inform my dissertation. Please note the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board has approved this study and all protocol and ethical guidelines will be followed.

### **Procedures:**

You are invited to participate in this research because you are an experienced Holocaust educator. You can expect to interview in 3 (three) sessions for approximately 60 minutes each. Additional follow-up interviews may follow and may be done through emails or phone calls. I will use a digital audio recorder for your interview, but your anonymity is guaranteed and will not be revealed to anybody else. You will be asked to review the transcripts to confirm this text and you can delete any part that you would not like to share with the public or to amend any incorrect statements.

### **Risks of Participation:**

There are no known risks associated with this project than are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you experience difficulties, please contact Naomi K. Poindexter at 918-808-7211.

### **Benefits of Participation:**

The benefits of consenting to allow me to interview you may result in professional development of yourself and other curriculum leaders.

### **Confidentiality:**

The record of the interview will be kept private in my home office until the analysis is complete by the end of the spring 2018 semester. I will not share your name in my writing, in my dissertation or for an article submission, and there will be no connection between you and your pseudonym. The pseudonym is for transcription purposes only and not to associate you with any data reporting. You have the right not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

In addition, I am required by law to report any ongoing child abuse of a minor to state officials. In addition, if an individual reports that he/she intends to harm him/herself or others, legal and professional standards require that the individual must be kept from harm, even if confidentiality must be broken.

### **Compensation:**

There is no compensation for participation in this research study.

### **Contacts:**

If you have any questions at any time, you may contact Naomi K. Poindexter at 918-808-7211 or [naomikp@okstate.edu](mailto:naomikp@okstate.edu). My advisor is Hongyu Wang, Ph.D., and her contact information is *School of Teaching and Curriculum*, 700 North Greenwood Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74106. Her office number is 918-594-8192 and email is: [hongyu.wang@okstate.edu](mailto:hongyu.wang@okstate.edu). The OSU Institutional Review Board contact information is *Office of University Research Compliance*, 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078. The contact phone number is 405-744-3377 and the email is [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**Participant Rights:**

Participation is voluntary and participants can discontinue the interview activity at any time without reprisal or penalty.

**Consent Documentation:**

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Please check the data sources you are allowing the researcher.

\_\_\_ Interview (s)      \_\_\_ Artifact (s)

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it. I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

### Interview 1 Questions:

1. Please share your life experiences before you began to teach about the Holocaust.
2. Could you tell me the story of when you first began to teach with Holocaust?
3. How were you introduced to the topic of the Holocaust?
4. Tell me about a time when you realized that Holocaust education was somehow significant to you?

### Interview 2 Questions:

5. What has helped you deal with the difficulty of teaching this subject?
6. What changes have you made to your Holocaust teaching and learning over the years?
7. What has helped you with sustained engagement?
8. Tell me about some surprises you have had in teaching? In teaching this subject?

### Interview 3 Questions:

9. In what ways do you help students who have a difficult time, perhaps at first, with the subject of the Holocaust?
10. Tell me about your learning about this subject and how this has influenced your teaching?
11. What does Holocaust education mean to you?
12. Please share any additional information.

## Appendix F: Writing Prompts

Writing prompt 1 is asked before the first interview and the participant emails this writing to me or brings the writing to the first interview. Writing prompt 2 is asked in between interview 2 and 3 and the participant writes out the response.

- Prompt 1: Tell me about your life before teaching?
- Prompt 2: Considering the last time we talked, what information or stories have come to your remembrance?

## Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, April 25, 2017

IRB Application No GC176

Proposal Title: Holocaust Teachers' Stories: Life, Pedagogy, and Meaning

Reviewed and Exempt  
Processed as:

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 4/24/2020**

Principal

Investigator(s):

Naomi Poindexter

238 Willard  
Stillwater, OK 74078

Hongyu Wang

OSU Tulsa 2444A Main Hall  
Tulsa, OK 74106

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

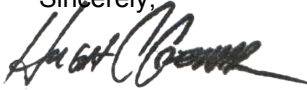
☐ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

## VITA

Naomi Kikue Poindexter

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: HOLOCAUST TEACHERS' STORIES: LIFE, PEDAGOGY, AND MEANING

Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical: Born June 8, 1962 in Honolulu, Hawaii to Tadashi and Josephine Najita.  
Graduated from Pearl City High School.

### Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Masters of Education in Reading from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in May 1989.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Education at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma in May 1984.

Experience: Taught middle school students in learning disabilities classrooms for 15 years. Then taught accelerated English in public schools for 13 years. Serve as a district instructional mentor.

Professional Memberships: American Education Research Association (AERA), Teacher Consultant for OSU Writing Project, Phi Kappa Phi, NEA, OEA, and TCTA.